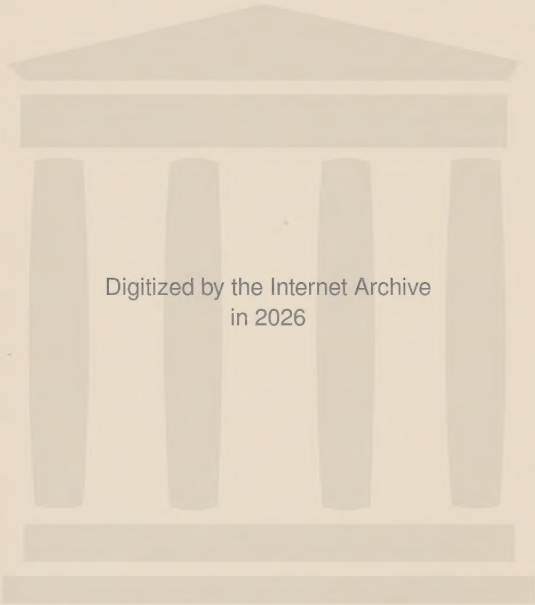
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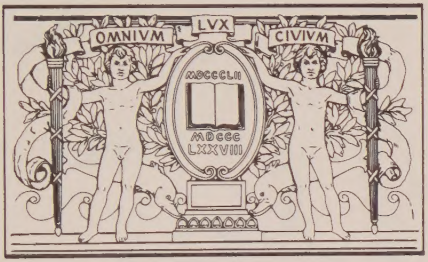

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AKHNATON
KING OF EGYPT

BY DMITRI MEREZHKOVSKY

Translated from the Russian by
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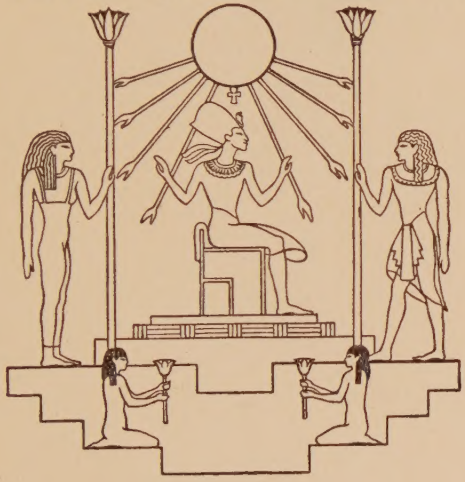

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Thou Father art in my heart and there is no other that knoweth Thee save Thy son Akhnaton.
"I . . . called My Son out of Egypt." Hosea, XI, 1

AKHNATON
KING OF EGYPT

PART I

AKHNATON, KING OF EGYPT

I

UTANKHAMON-TUTANKHATON, the envoy of Akhnaton, the king of Egypt, brought him a marvellous gift from the island of Crete—Dio, the dancer, the pearl of the Kingdom of the Seas.

He boasted that he had saved her from death: but it was not he who saved her. When she killed the god-Bull in the Knossos arena to avenge her friend Eoia who had been sacrificed to the Beast, she was sentenced to be burned at the stake. But Tammuzadad, a Babylonian who loved Dio, went to the stake in her place and Tutankhaton merely hid her in his ship and brought her to Egypt.

Before bringing Dio to the king in the new capital, Akhetaton, the City of the Sun, he settled her near Thebes, or Nut-Amon, in the country house of his distant relative Khnumhotep, formerly the chief superintendent of the granaries of Amon's temple.

Khnumhotep's estate was enclosed by high brick walls that formed an oblong quadrangle making it look like a fortress. Within it were granaries, cattle-yards, wine-presses, hay-lofts, barns and other build-

ings, vineyards and gardens divided into regular squares: kitchen garden, orchard, flower garden, woods of pine and other trees and a palm plantation with three ponds, one large and two small ones. Two high three-storied houses, a brick one for winter and a wooden one with a brick bottom storey for the summer, stood facing each other on opposite sides of the big pond.

Dio spent a couple of months in this quiet country place resting from all that had happened to her in Crete and learning Egyptian dances.

One afternoon, in the middle of winter, she was lying on carpets and cushions on the flat roof of the summer house, in a light trellised shelter supported by a row of cedar pillars, carved, gilded and brightly painted. She was looking at the sun in the dark, almost black-blue sky, so abysmally clear that it seemed there never had been, nor ever could be, a cloud in it. The sun of southern winter—of winter's summer—bright but not dazzling, warm but not scorching, was like the smile of a child asleep. Half closing her eyes, she looked straight at it and the light broke into a diamond rainbow like a tear on the eyelashes.

"Ra the Sun, the Sun Ra—no better name than Ra could be invented for the sun: Ra cleaves the darkness with a sword," thought Dio.

The winter swallows cleaved the radiant darkness of the blue with the sword of their whirring flight: they sang to the sun, crying and shrilling with joy: 'Ra'!

Everything was good and joyous. There was goodness and joy in the air, pure and dry as nowhere

else in the world, giving long life to the living and making the dead incorruptible, air so divinely light that one breathing it for the first time felt as though a stone which had lain on his breast all his life had suddenly been lifted and he understood for the first time what a joy it was to breathe.

Close by stood a monstrous tree, covered with thorns and prickles, with dull leaden-coloured thick joints that seemed full of poison, and a huge blood-red flower like the open mouth of a snake. But the tree, too, was good: the fragrant flowers breathed of the sweetness of paradise—the joy of Ra.

Beyond the talc-like streak of the shallow, wintry Nile the hills of Amenti, the Eternal West, yellow as lion's hair and honeycombed with innumerable tombs, lay drowsy in the rosy haze of sunshine. But even death here was good: the souls of the departed, like bees, collect the honey of death—the eternal life.

"And perhaps on our Mount Ida the wind is howling, the pines creak and the snow is falling in big flakes," thought Dio, and the blue sky seemed to her still more blue, the bright sun still brighter; she wanted to weep with joy and to kiss the sky, the sun, the earth, like the faces of loved ones after a long parting.

She was smiling at the familiar feeling: it was not for nothing that she had felt the touch of death as she lay on the pyre, a victim ready to be slain. It was as though she had died then, and now another life, a life after death had begun: a different sky, a different sun, a different earth—alien? oh no, more like home than her own native land.

"Sick with sorrow I lie on my bed
Wise physicians are trying to heal me.
My loved one comes to my bedside,
My sister—she mocks the physicians.
Well does she know what ails me."

sang in an undertone a man of thirty, with a face fine as a woman's and large sad eyes like the eyes of a sick child; his head was shaven like that of a priest and he was wearing a white linen robe and a leopard's skin thrown over his shoulder. This was Pentaur, a former priest of Amon and the master of the temple dancers, who was teaching Dio Egyptian dances.

Kneeling down, he lightly touched with the tips of his fingers the crossed strings of a tall Amon's harp that stood on a hollow resounding box, adorned with two rainbow-coloured sun discs and a four-horned head of the god Ram.

The dulcet notes of the harpstrings accompanied the voice of the singer. He finished one song and began another:

"Each time that the door
In my sister's house opens
My sister is displeased.
I wish I were her doorkeeper,
She would then be displeased with me.
Each time that I heard her voice,
Frightened as a child I should be."

"Is that all?" Dio asked with a smile.

"That's all," said Pentaur, flushing slightly as though ashamed of his song being too short. He flushed often and easily like a little boy; it was strange and almost absurd in a man of thirty, but Dio liked it.

"Frightened as a child I should be," she repeated,

this time without a smile. "Yes, hardly anything is said and yet all is said. With you in Egypt love is wordless, just as the sky is cloudless. . . ."

"No, we have longer songs, too, but I don't like them so well; the short ones are better."

He struck the strings and sang:

"I long for you more
Than a starving man longs for bread,
Than a sick one longs for health,
Than a woman in travail for the baby's cry."

The strings sobbed passionately, almost brutally, as men sob with hunger, thirst, or pain. And all of a sudden came a subtle, cunning tune:

"I love truth, of flattery I scorn to think
I would rather see you than eat and drink."

"Love compared to eating and drinking," she said in surprise and she pondered. "How coarse—coarse and tender at the same time! But of course that is the very subtlest flattery."

"Why flattery?"

"Why? Ah, my dear brother, that is just what is so bitter in life, that without bread and water men die, but without love they live."

"No, they die, too," he said quietly, and was going to add something, but merely gazed at her in silence and his eyes looked sadder than ever. He blushed and hastened to change the subject.

"I must send the pleater to you: the feathers don't lie properly."

He put out his hand to straighten the tiny pleats—'feathers'—on her sleeve. Dio took his hand; he tried to draw it away, but she kept it in hers almost by force, roughly and tenderly at the same time,

looking into his eyes with a smile. He turned away and this time, instead of turning red, he turned slightly pale under his bronze-coloured skin, frightened as a child.

This happened at every meeting: her charm, always new, seemed to him a miracle. Oh, this body, much too slender, the narrow hips, the angular movements, the rebellious curls of bluish-black hair cut much too short, the colour in the cheeks, dark-skinned like a boy's and girlishly tender, the colour of the rosy almond blossom in the gathering dusk, and the darkish down on the upper lip—an absurd little moustache! A girl who was like a boy. This was always so; but it was new that all of a sudden the girl did not want to be a boy.

She let his hand go, blushed and spoke of something different.

"It is not the pleater's fault, it is simply that I do not know how to wear these clothes—one can see at once I am not an Egyptian."

"Yes, but it is not the dress—it's your face and hair."

Dio did not wear a wig or plait her hair in small tight plaits as was the custom in Egypt.

"And Tuta . . . Tutankhaton says that the bell suits me better."

"The bell" was the Cretan women's skirt, widening towards the hem.

"Oh, no! In our dress you are still more . . ." he broke off; he wanted to say 'still more like a sister' and dared not: in Egyptian 'sister' also meant 'beloved.'

"Still more beautiful," he added with cold polite-

ness. They were not speaking their thoughts; both were thinking of what was important and speaking of trifles, as often happens when one is already in love and the other does not yet know her mind.

Dio remembered the vow of the virgin priestesses of the Mount Dicte goddess:

> "I would rather choose the halter
> Than the hateful marriage bed."

A man's love was still as hateful to her as the hot sun to the flowers under water. But it was the same with love as with everything else: she had died and another life had begun, another love—love through death, like sunlight through water, having no terrors for the flowers in the depths; or like this winter sun—the smile of a child asleep.

"When are you going?" he asked about the most important thing as though it were a trifle.

"I don't know. Tuta hurries me, but I am quite happy here." She looked at him with a smile and again the boy disappeared and only the girl remained.

"I am happy with you," she added so low that he need not have heard.

"You will go away and we shall never meet again," he said, looking down as though he had not heard.

"My timid, absurd little boy—the winter's sun!" she thought with gay tenderness and said:

"Why never? Akhetaton is not far from Thebes."

"No, *his* city is the other world for us."

His—King Akhnaton's, she understood.

"And you don't want to go to the next world—not even with me?" she asked, with provocative slyness.

"Why do you talk like this, Dio? You know I cannot . . ."

He broke off, but she understood again: "I cannot relinquish the faith of my forefathers; step over my father's blood." She knew that his father, an old priest of Amon, was killed in a popular rising against the new god Aton.

Tears trembled in his voice when he said 'I cannot,' but he controlled himself and said calmly.

"Do not go out to-day."

"Why?"

He answered after a pause:

"Maybe there will be a riot."

"Come, come, riot in a country like yours!" she laughed. "You Egyptians are the most peaceable people on earth!"

She looked at him as though he were a little boy and said: "And you, too, will go rioting?"

"Yes, I will," he spoke as calmly as before, but there was a light in his eyes that made her think once more of his father's having been killed in a riot.

"No, don't go, dear!" she begged with sudden anxiety.

He made no answer and began singing again in a low voice, lightly touching the strings.

> "Death is now to me like sweetest myrrh,
> Death is now to me like healing,
> Death is now to me like refreshing rain,
> Death is now to me like a home to an exile."

"Aïe-aïe-aïe! What is it?" cried a little girl who was sleeping in the shelter.

A little tame monkey was sitting at the top of the

tree eating yellow pods. It threw the skins into the shelter trying to hit the little girl or the tame gazelle asleep at her feet. It missed its aim every time. At last, hanging on to a branch with one paw, it threw with another a handful of skins, hitting the gazelle. The animal jumped up, and bleating ran to the girl and licked her face.

The girl jumped up, too, and shouted in a fright. "Aïe-aïe-aïe! What is it?"

She was about thirteen years old. Her brown bronze-coloured body, slender and supple like a snake, showed through the transparent web of her dress 'the woven air.' She was a strange mixture of woman and child; the rosy-bronzed nipples of her breasts, firm and round like a grown girl's, lifted the linen as though they would pierce it, but there was something childishly mischievous in the eyes and childishly piteous in the thick, pouting lips. Her face—ugly, charming and dangerous like a serpent's head—seemed tiny under the mass of dull-black fluffy hair, powdered with blue.

Miruit was one of Pentaur's best pupils; he was training Dio to imitate her. She threw back her arms, stretched and yawned sweetly, still failing to understand what had happened. Suddenly a handful of pods fell at her feet. She looked up and understood.

"Ah, you bare-back devil!" she cried, and seizing an earthenware jug from which she had drunk pomegranate wine at dinner—that was why she had slept so soundly—threw it at the monkey.

The animal hissed maliciously and, snapping its teeth, jumped on to another palm tree and hid itself;

only a dry rustle among the leaves betrayed its presence.

"It is too bad! As soon as I begin dreaming of something nice they are sure to wake me!" Miruit grumbled.

"And what were you dreaming of?" asked Dio.

"Oh, all sorts of things. Too good to tell." Suddenly she came up to Dio, bent down and whispered in her ear:

"It was about you. I dreamt that you . . . No, I can't say it before him; he will hear and pull my ears."

"I will do it anyhow, you fidget! Do you imagine I don't know where you go gadding every day?"

"Oh, thank you for reminding me. I am late! My merchant must be waiting for me and raging, and he had promised me a necklace for to-day. Mine is so shabby that I am simply ashamed to wear it."

"You nasty hussy!" Pentaur shouted at her with sudden anger. "Mixing yourself up with an unclean dog, an uncircumcised!"

"He may be an unclean dog, but he is rich and he feeds me and there is no making broth with your holiness!" the girl answered back insolently, imitating old market women. "It is four months since we have had any flour or grain or beer or oil, it's no joke! We've tightened our belts on the hunger rations, we've got as thin as locusts on the Salty Lakes. A well-fed devil is stronger than a hungry god; other people's Baal may be of avail and our own Ram is meek but not sleek!"

"Ah, you wretch! Do you want to be thrown into the pit?"

"Into the pit? No, sir, that's more than you can do! Times have changed, you can't throw innocent people into the pit nowadays. If you try to lay hands on me I'll run away and you won't catch me! I am a free bird—wherever there is food, there is my home."

"Oh, birds of Araby,
Oh, myrrh anointed!"

she sang, turning the tambourine above her head as she ran towards the staircase. The gazelle followed her like a dog.

At the top of the stairs she ran into Zenra, Dio's old nurse, and nearly knocked her down.

"Plague take you, you giddy goat!" swore the old woman and going up to Dio handed her a letter. Dio opened it and read:

I am going to-morrow. If you want to go with me, make ready. I must see you to-day before sunset. I will wait for you at the White House. I will send a boat for you. May Aton keep you. Your faithful friend,
Tutankhaton.

"The messenger is waiting, what shall I tell him?" Zenra asked.

"Tell him I will come."

When Zenra had gone, Dio looked at Pentaur. Like all the priestesses of the Great Mother she was skilled in the art of healing; she had seen people die and remembered the fateful sign—the seal of death—which sometimes appears in a face when the end is near.

She suddenly fancied she saw that sign in Pentaur's face. 'He is young, healthy, there is no danger in sight. Riot? No, it is nonsense,' she thought, and

as she looked at him more intently the sign disappeared.

"Are you going?" he asked quietly, but so firmly that she understood she must not deceive him.

"Tuta is going to-morrow and I do not know yet. Maybe I will not go. . . ."

"Yes, you will. You wanted to go as soon as possible, you know."

"I did and now, all of a sudden, I am afraid."

"What of?"

"I don't know. I was not burned at the stake then, and now—it is like going from one fire to another. . . . You remember what you told me about the king. . . ."

"Don't, Dio. What is the good? You will go anyway."

"No, you must tell me. Taur, my dear brother, if you love me, tell me all you know about him. I want to know all."

She took his hand and he did not draw it away this time.

"You will go anyway, you will go!" he repeated sadly. "You love him, that is why you are afraid; you know you will not escape; you fly like a moth to the flame. You were not burned in that other flame, but you will be in this. . . ."

He paused, and then asked her:

"Will you go to see Ptamose?"

"Certainly, I will not leave without seeing him."

"Do see him. He knows everything—he will tell you better than I can."

Ptamose, the high-priest of Amon and King Akhnaton's bitterest enemy, had long asked Dio to come

to him, but she had not done so yet and only now, before going away, decided to see him.

"Ptamose is nothing to me," she went on. "I want to know from you. You had loved him once, why do you hate him now?"

"It is not him I hate. Do you know, Dio, I sometimes fancy . . ."

He looked at her with the smile of a frightened child looking at a grown-up person.

"Well, tell me, don't be afraid, I understand!"

"I sometimes fancy that he is not quite human. . . ."

"Not quite human?" she repeated in surprise: there was something knowing, something clairvoyant in his face and voice.

"There are dolls like that," he went on, with the same smile. "If you pull a string, they dance. That's what he is like, he does not do anything of himself, but somebody does it for him. Don't you understand? Perhaps you will when you see him."

"Have you seen much of him?"

"Yes. We were pupils of the Heliopolis priests together—he, Merira, who is now the high priest of Aton, and myself. I was thirteen then and the prince fourteen. He was very handsome, and gentle, very gentle, like the god whose name is Quiet Heart."

"Osiris?"

"Yes. I loved him as my own soul. He often went to the desert to pray or, perhaps, simply to be alone. One day he went—and disappeared. We looked and looked for him, and thought he was lost altogether. At last he was found among the shep-

herds in the fields of Rostia where the Pyramids are and the Sphinx—the ancient god of the sun, Aton. He was lying on the sand like one dead, probably after an epileptic fit—it was then he began having fits. And when they brought him to the town I did not know him; it was he, and not he, his double, a changeling—as I have said just now, he was not quite human. Perhaps it was there in the desert that *he* entered into him. . . ."

"Whom do you mean?"

"The spirit of the desert, Set."

"The Devil?"

"You call him the devil and we—another god. Well, that was the beginning of it all."

"Wait a minute," she interrupted. "You say Aton is an ancient god?"

"Yes, more ancient than Amon."

"And you worship him?"

"Yes, just as we worship all the gods: all the gods are members of the One."

"Then what is your quarrel about?"

"Why, did you think it was about this? Come, we are not such fools as not to know that Amon and Aton are one and the same god. The visible face of the Sun is Aton, its hidden face is Amon, but there is only one Sun, only one God. No, the dispute is not between Aton and Amon, but between Set and Osiris. Set has killed and dismembered Osiris and he wants to kill and dismember the holy land of Osiris, Egypt. This is why he has entered the king. . . . You are not listening, Dio."

"Yes, I am. But you keep telling me by whom the

king is possessed and I want to know what he himself is. Simply wicked?"

"No, not wicked. It is just like the devil's cunning to possess a saint and not a man of evil. The country is perishing in a fratricidal war, the fields are empty, the granaries plundered, the people's skin is black with parching hunger, the mothers cook their own children for food—and it is all his doing, the saint's. And he has done more: he has killed God. 'There is no Son,' he said. 'I am the Son.' "

"Never, never has he said that!" cried Dio, and there was such a fire in her eyes as though she, too, were possessed by Set. " 'There has been no Son, but there will be'—this is what he said. Has been or will be—the whole question is in that."

"Cursed is he who says there has been no Son," said Pentaur, turning pale.

"Cursed is he who says there will be no Son," said Dio, turning pale also.

Both were silent—they understood that they had cursed each other.

He buried his face in his hands. She went up to him and, without speaking, kissed him on the head, as a mother kisses a sick child. She looked into his face and it suddenly seemed to her again that there was the seal of death upon it:

Death is now to me like sweetest myrrh,
Death is now to me like healing,
Death is now to me like refreshing rain,
Death is now to me like a home to an exile!

II

HNUMHOTEP was an honest and god-fearing man.

He welcomed Dio in his house as though she had been a member of his own family, not because she was under the patronage of Tut-ankhaton, who had power and influence at court, but because exiles were under the protection of the immortal gods. While he was the chief superintendent of Amon's granaries he might have taken bribes like everyone else; but he did not. When Amon's sanctuary was closed and Khnumhotep lost his post, he might have received another and a better one, had he been false to the faith of his fathers; but he remained true to it. At the time of famine he might have sold at an exorbitant price the corn from his estates in the Lake country, Miuer, which had not suffered from drought, but he sold it cheaper than usual and gave away one granary-full to the starving.

He lived in this way because he remembered the wisdom of his fathers: "a man lives after death and all his works with him"; he remembered the scales with the heart of the dead man upon one of them, and the lightest feather of the goddess Maat, Truth, upon the other,—the sharp eye of the god Tot,

the Measurer, watching the pointer of the scales.

In his youth he doubted whether the short day of life was not worth more than the dark eternity and whether those who said "a man dying is like a bubble bursting on the water—nothing is left" were not right. But as he grew older he felt more and more clearly—grasped it, as it were, as a hand grasps a wrapped-up object—that there was something beyond the grave, and that since no one knew anything about it for certain, the simplest and wisest thing to do was to believe as his fathers had done.

Khnumhotep, or Khnum, was over sixty, but he did not consider himself old, hoping to live the full measure of man's life—a hundred and ten years.

Some forty years before he began building for himself 'an eternal house,' a tomb in the Hills of the West, Amenti, also according to the ancient commandment 'prepare a fine tomb for thyself and remember it every day of thy life, for thou knowest not the hour of thy death.' For forty years he had been digging in the rock a deep cave with subterranean halls and passages, adorning it like a wedding chamber and collecting in it a dowry for his soul, the bride. He did it all cheerfully according to the saying, 'coffin, thou hast been made for a feast; grave, thou hast been dug for merriment.'

On the afternoon when Dio and Pentaur were talking on the flat roof of Khnum's summer house, Khnum was sitting in a light wooden shelter, supported by four pillars, near the winter house at the other end of the pond. He sat in a carved ebony chair that had a leather cushion and a footstool; his wife Nibituia sat beside him on a small folding chair.

Both were dressed in robes of finely pleated white flaxen material, not too transparent, as became elderly people; hers was narrow and reached to the ankles and his was wider and shorter; their feet were bare. The brick floor of the shelter was covered with mats for warmth and a servant boy was holding in readiness papyrus slippers.

Khnum took the wig off his closely cropped grey hair and hung it on a wooden stand close by; men took off their wigs like caps; but Nibituia's huge black wig, shiny as though it had been lacquered, with two thick twisted cords at the sides, rose above her head, pushing the ears forward and making the old woman's wrinkled face look like a bat's.

Khnum was so tall that his wife, who was short, looked almost a dwarf beside him; straight, spare, bony, he had a face that seemed carved of hard brown wood and had a sullen, angry look; but when he smiled it grew very kind.

On week days Nibituia was busy with housekeeping from morning till night, looking after the weaving, the mat-making, the cooking and the washing, but on holidays, such as that day—the day of Khonsu, the god of the Moon, she gave herself a rest, engaging in a light and at the same time pious occupation. Two little pots and two baskets stood before her on a low round table: out of one of them she took dead beetles, scarabees, butterflies, bees, grasshoppers, ripped them open with a flint knife, and taking with a bone spoon a drop of Arabian gum out of one pot and a drop of Lebanon cedar resin out of another, embalmed the dead creatures; then she wrapped them up in tiny white linen bandages, like

real little mummies, and put them into the other basket. She did all this quickly and neatly as a work she was accustomed to do. In the garden there was a sandhill of Amenti—Eternal West—a cemetery for these little mummies.

A middle aged man with a sly and merry face, Inioteph or Ini, was sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of Khnum; he was a clerk in the Surveying Department, managed Khnum's estates and transacted legal business for him. Bare to his waist, he wore nothing but an apron; there was an inkpot on his belt and a writing reed behind his ear, and in his hand he held a roll of papyrus with the account of sacks of grain which had just been brought down the river in barges from Miuer.

"When was the decree received?" Khnum asked.

"In the night and it must be carried out to-day, that the sun may not set on disobedience to the king," Ini answered.

"Quite, quite, quite," Khnum rapped out like a woodpecker tapping, as was his habit. "They persecuted the Father, they persecuted the Mother, and now it is the turn of the Son!"

The Son was Khonsu—the Osiris of Thebes, born of the Father Amon and the Mother Mut.

"But how is he to be destroyed? He is made of gold," Khnum said.

'They will throw him into the furnace, melt him, make coins out of the gold, buy bread and give it to the starving: eat the god and praise the king!" Inioteph explained.

"Surely this is very wrong? Uhuh have mercy upon us!" Nibituia said with a sigh.

Uhuh was a very ancient god forgotten by everyone; he had no idols, no temples, no sacrifices, no priests—nothing was left of him but a name. People remembered merely that there had been a god Uhuh, but they had long forgotten what he ruled over and what he looked like. And this was the very reason why Nibituia liked him and pitied him and at difficult moments called not upon the great Amon, but upon the obscure Uhuh. "No one prays to him, poor Uhuh, but I will pray and he will have mercy upon me," the old lady used to say.

"And what do the people say?" Khnum asked.

"They haven't much hope of the bread," said Ini, screwing up his eyes with a sly air. "'The king's clerks, Aton's hangers-on, will steal it all,' they say, 'and we shan't get a morsel!' And the priests incite them, of course: stand up for the god, do not allow the holy image to be defiled! And saying such things to the people is like setting fire to straw. You know yourself, my lord, what times these are; I shouldn't wonder if there were a mutiny."

"Quite, quite, quite! Mutiny is a dreadful thing."

"Nothing could be worse! It is said: 'the earth will tremble, unable to endure that slaves should be masters.' But indeed what is one to expect of slaves when the king himself . . . ."

"Don't presume to speak about the king; you will be food for fish," Khnum restrained him.

That meant: if anyone found fault with the king he would be thrown after death into the river to be eaten by fishes.

"And what is the second decree about?"

"About making burial grounds crown property.

They are to be taken from the rich and given to the poor: 'it is time the dead stopped taking food out of the mouths of the living.' "

"Quite, quite, quite," Khnum repeated, and said nothing more, watching Nibituia's little hands move rapidly as she wrapped up the mummy of a grasshopper.

"Uhuh have mercy upon us!" she sighed again and, leaving the grasshopper, looked at her husband with round, frightened eyes. "How can this be, Khnum? What will the dead live by?"

"Keep quiet, old woman, that's beyond you, you mind your beetles!" he grumbled, patting her on the shoulder with a smile, and his face suddenly became very kind and curiously like his wife's face in spite of the difference in their features; they seemed to be brother and sister: happily married couples often develop a likeness in their old age.

"The dead will have enough to live on, don't you fear; we, the living, might fare worse!" he added, gloomily.

He really was not much concerned about the dead. If a decree were issued forbidding people to eat and drink they would go on eating and drinking just as before; the same thing would happen about this decree: the living would not stop feeding the dead, for the very being of Egypt rested upon this, that the living and the dead had the same food, the same drink—the body and blood of Khonsu Osiris, the Son of God.

"I expect we shall have to bribe Aton's spies after all," Inioteph went on.

He did not like Khnum's fearlessness; like all

servants who are a little too forward, he had the bad habit of frightening his master in order to gain importance in his eyes.

"They have sniffed out, the dogs, that in your honour's tomb two images of Amon have not been effaced. 'We must inspect it,' they say. And if they discover it, there will be trouble; they will spoil everything and defile the tomb or prosecute you—there will be no end to it!"

"How did they find out?" Khnum asked in surprise.

"Someone must have informed against you."

"Who could it have been? No stranger has seen it."

"It must have been one of your own people, then."

"It is he, he, Yubra, the villain, the snake!" Nibituia cried in alarm. "I told you, Khnum, don't keep that plague in the house, send him to the Red Mountains to break stones or to dig canals in the Delta, so that he may get the ague, the wretch! It is not for nothing he has made friends with Aton's servants. Just think what he has done! It is dreadful to think of—raising his hand against the holy Ushebti, the godless creature! And you spare him. . . ."

"I have thrown him into the pit, what more do you want?"

"What does the snake care about the pit? He likes being there better than working. I know, Khnum, you gave orders for him to have two loaves of bread and a pot of beer a day, though you tried to hide it from me. He is eating his fill, the swine, growing fat and laughing at you for all your kindness! He

sleeps all day or sings hymns to his unclean god, fie upon him!"

"Whatever is the matter with you, little beetle?" said Khnum, looking at her in surprise.

They exchanged a deep look and he turned away from her, frowning sternly. Nibituia got up and bowed low to her husband:

"Forgive your servant, my lord, if I have said anything wrong in my foolishness. You know better. But I am uneasy—" she could not resist looking at him significantly once more, "I am very uneasy about you, Khnum! You are fond of him, you spoil him, and he is sharpening a knife against you, nursing malice in return for all your kindness—and such malice is worse than any other."

Ini was smiling to himself: he had gained his object and alarmed his masters, though he himself did not know how he had done it. Yubra was not of sufficient consequence for them to be alarmed on his account.

"Well, that's all right," said Khnum, as though coming to himself. "I have known Yubra long enough: he is as stupid as an ass but he would not do . . . . such a thing: he is a faithful servant."

And breaking off suddenly, he asked Ini: "Are they storing the corn?"

"Yes, master."

"Let us go and see; they are sure not to spread it evenly."

He got up and walked across the garden to the threshing yard. "Dead flies spoil a fragrant ointment, so a little folly spoils the whole life of an honourable man," Khnum had often thought of late,

with a bitter smile. This was what had happened in his house.

Wise men knew that the next world, 'the second Egypt,' was exactly similar to this one, though the semblance was reversed as in a mirror: here everything was for the worse and made for death, while there everything was for the best, for everlasting life. But there, too, in the heavenly fields of Ialu, the shadows of the dead, the blessed Ka, ploughed the land, sowed, reaped, gathered in the harvest, dug canals and built houses. For all this work masters needed slaves. This was why they placed in each tomb three hundred and sixty-five clay figures—according to the number of days in the year—each with a spade in its hand, a set of tools in a bag on its back and a hieroglyphic inscription on the breast: "Thou, Ushebti, Respondent so and so, belonging to such and such a master, come up instead of me, say for me 'Here am I,' if I am called out to work." At the resurrection of the dead, when the masters came to life, the slaves came to life, too, and went to work in the fields of Ialu, for there, as here, slaves worked and masters enjoyed themselves.

Khnum had ordered a sample two dozen Ushebti of the modeller who worked at adorning tombs. He made them so cleverly that from the clay dolls' faces one could tell which of Khnum's servants they represented: this was to enable each soul to find its body.

When the modeller brought the figures Khnum's slaves ran out to meet him at the gate, by the box of old Yubra, the porter, jostling, shouting and laughing, pleased as children: each was in a hurry

to find and recognize his own doll. "Which is me? Which is me?" they all kept saying.

Yubra came up, too, and also asked "Which is me?" The potter gave him his doll. Yubra took it, examined it, asked to have the inscription read to him, and, suddenly, he seemed like one possessed. Those who were present said afterwards his face turned quite dark, he trembled all over and, shouting "I don't want to, I don't want to!" flung the clay figure on the ground and broke it to bits. All stood still, spellbound with horror, while Yubra went on breaking the other dolls arranged on an ironing board from the laundry. Then they rushed at him, but could not master him at once—he fought like a fury. At last, when he had broken more than half the dolls, he was overpowered, and, with his hands bound, brought before Khnum for judgment.

It was a terrible act of sacrilege: every mummy, not only of man, but even of a beast, was the body of the dead god himself, Osiris-Amenti.

When Khnum asked Yubra why he had done it, Yubra answered firmly and quietly:

"To save my soul. Here I am a slave, but there I shall be free."

He would say nothing more.

Khnum thought that Yubra had suddenly lost his reason or was possessed by the devil. He was sorry for his old and faithful servant. He could not pardon Yubra completely, but he punished him lightly and did not even have him beaten; he merely had him put into the pit; he thought Yubra would come to his senses. But Yubra had been in the pit for four days and was as obdurate as ever.

There was a special reason why Khnum was so kind to him. In his youth Khnum liked to hunt crocodiles in the Lake country, Miuer, where he had a large estate by the town Shedet, consecrated to the crocodile-headed Sun god, Sobek. He used to spend several days there during the hunting season.

Every morning, while he was still in bed, a freshly washed and pleated white robe was brought to him by the fifteen-year old Maïta, a clever laundress—wife and sister of the young gardener Yubra: poor people often married their sisters so as not to divide the property.

At dusk Khnum used to hear in the back yard, where some planks ran out from the laundry into the pond, the loud squelching of the bat over the wet linen and Maïta's girlish voice singing:

"My sister is on the opposite bank
The river flows between us,
And a crocodile lies on the sand.
Fearless I go into the water,
Water is to me like the dry land,
Love gives me courage and strength,
Love—the all-powerful magic."

But one could hear from her voice that she did not yet know what love meant. "She will soon learn," Khnum thought with quiet pity.

One day she sang a different song:

"The pomegranate tree spoke and said:
My round fruits are her breasts,
The seeds in the fruit are her teeth,
The heart of my fruits are her lips,
And what the sister does with the brother,
Gladdened by the sparkling wine,
Is hidden by my branches thick."

And for the first time Khnum detected something not childish in Maïta's childish voice. "She will be

like the rest," he thought, without any pity, and all of a sudden the flame of Set breathed into his face and lust stung his heart like a scorpion.

He knew that neither men nor gods would condemn him if he, the master, said to his slave "come into my bed," as simply as on a hot day he would say to her, "give me a drink." But Khnum was indeed a just and pious man. He remembered that besides his wife Nibituia he had twelve concubines and as many beautiful slaves as he liked, while Yubra had only Maïta. Was the master to take his servant's only lamb? "This shall not be," he decided, and he left the Lake country never to return.

But he could not forget Maïta. The flame of Set scorched his bones as the wind of the desert scorches the grass. He could not eat or drink or sleep and grew thin as a lath.

He had said nothing to Nibituia, but she guessed the truth. One early morning, while he was still asleep, Maïta came into the bedroom of his country house near Thebes, bringing freshly washed clothes. He woke up thinking he saw her in a dream or a vision, and when he understood she was real he asked:

"Where is Yubra, your brother?"

"Far away beyond the sea," she answered and burst into tears. Then she came up to him slowly, sat on the side of the bed, and with downcast eyes said, blushing and smiling through her tears:

"My mistress has sent me to my master. Here I am, your slave."

And Khnum asked her no more about Yubra.

That year was the happiest year of his life; and

the best of all was that Nibituia had grown just as fond of Maïta as he was, perhaps even more so. She was jealous not of her but of other women and, strange to say, reproached him for preferring herself to Maïta. And Khnum did not know whom he loved most—the mistress or the slave: both these loves merged into one like two scents blending into one fragrance.

When he recalled it now, after thirty years, he whispered with tears of tenderness for the old companion of his life: "My poor little beetle!"

Nibituia had sent Yubra, the gardener, to Canaan to collect foreign flowers and plants for Khnum's gardens. And when, after a year's absence he returned, Maïta was no more: she had died in childbirth.

Khnum treated Yubra handsomely: he presented him with a fine plot of land, four pairs of oxen and a new wife—one of his own concubines. No one knew whether Yubra remembered Maïta or had forgotten her with a new wife, for he never spoke of her and behaved as though nothing had happened.

When Yubra had grown old and could no longer work in the fields Khnum took him into his house and gave him the honourable post of doorkeeper.

For thirty years Yubra had been an obedient slave and now all of a sudden he rebelled and said:

"I don't want to! Here I am a slave, but there I shall be free." For thirty years Khnum had not thought that he had done any evil to Yubra and now, all of a sudden, he thought: "Dead flies spoil a fragrant ointment and so a little folly spoils the whole life of an honourable man!"

III

HE conical clay granaries stood by the back wall of the granary yard. Every one of them had a round opening at the top for pouring in the grain and a window with a board that lifted for pouring it out.

Slaves, brown as brick and naked but for white aprons and caps, were climbing up the ladders to the upper windows of the granaries, pouring into them grain that glided down with a gentle rustle like liquid gold.

This was the new corn from the Miuer Lakes. Looking at it Khnum remembered the starving and gave orders that a whole granary-full should be given to them.

Then he walked to the cattle-yard where the prison-pit was. It was a square hole dug in the ground, with brick walls and a brick bridge-like roof with a grated window in it.

Khnum went up to the pit, bent down to the window and heard quiet singing.

"Glory be to thee, Aton, the living and only God,
Who hast created the heavens and the secrets thereof!
Thou art in heaven and here upon earth is thy son
Akhnaton, the joy of the Sun!"

The man in the pit must have caught sight of

Khnum, for he suddenly sang aloud and, it seemed to Khnum, with insolent defiance:

"When thou descendest beyond the sky
The dead come to life in thy life;
Thou givest their nostrils the breath of life,
And the air to their stifled throats,
Glorifying thee from their narrow tombs
The dead stretch forth their hands,
And they who are at rest rejoice."

Khnum walked away and, returning to the shelter by the big pond, sat down in his old place beside Nibituia who was still wrapping up her beetles. Inioteph began reading a new endless account of sacks of corn. Khnum felt dreary. He was conscious of the ominous weight in his right side, under the last rib; he suffered from his liver. His father had died of the same complaint at the age of eighty—"Perhaps I, too, will die before I have fulfilled my span of days," thought Khnum.

He liked to have something of his tomb dowry brought to him every day. To-day they brought him the sacred Beetle, Kheper, made of lapis-lazuli.

The great beetle of the Sun, Ra-Kheper, rolls along the sky its great ball as the dung beetle rolls its small ball along the earth. The Sun is the great heart of the world; the human heart is a small sun. This was why they put inside the mummy, in the place of the heart which was taken out, the Sun beetle Kheper with a hieroglyphic inscription—the prayer of the dead at the Last Judgment: "Heart of my birth, heart of my mother, my earthly heart, do not rise against me, do not bear witness against me!"

"I shouldn't wonder if mine did rise against me,"

thought Khnum, recalling Yubra, and he smiled: "Extraordinary! Fancy comparing the sun to a dung beetle!"

He recalled another prayer of the dead: "May my soul walk every day in the garden beside my pond; may it flutter like a bird among the branches of my trees; may it rest in the shade of my sycamore; may it rise up to heaven and come down to earth unhindered."

"And perhaps it is all nonsense," he thought as he used to think in his youth. "A man dies—like a water bubble bursting—and nothing is left of him. And, indeed, it may be as well, for what if one grew bored there also?"

He had once seen an eclipse of the sun: the day had been fine and bright and suddenly everything grew dim and grey, as though covered with a layer of ash, and all was dull, numb and dead. It was the same now. "It's my liver," he thought, "and Yubra, too."

"I must put an end to it," he said aloud. "Go and fetch him!"

"Whom, master?" Inioteph asked, looking at him in surprise.

Nibituia too raised her eyes in alarm.

At that moment Dio and Pentaur came into the garden from the roof of the summer house: Zenra had told her mistress that Tuta had sent a boat for her.

As they were passing the shelter by the big pond, Khnum called to them:

"I am just going to judge Yubra, my slave. You be judges, too."

He made Pentaur sit down beside him and Dio sat on the mat by Nibituia.

Yubra, with his arms tied behind his back, was brought in and made to kneel before Khnum. He was a little old man with a dark wrinkled face that looked like a stone or a lump of earth.

"Well, Yubra, how much longer are you going to sit in the pit?" Khnum asked.

"As long as it is your pleasure," Yubra answered, with downcast eyes and, Khnum fancied, with the same defiance with which he sang Aton's hymn in the pit.

"Look here, old man; I have spared you and not handed you over to the magistrates, but do you know what the lawful penalty is for what you have done? To be buried alive or thrown into the water with a stone round your neck."

"Well, let them put me to death for truth's sake."

"For what truth? Say plainly what possessed you to raise your hand against the holy Ushebti?"

"I have told you already."

"Surely you can take the trouble to say it again."

"I did it for my soul's sake. To save my soul. Here I am a slave, but there I shall be free."

He paused and then said in a changed voice: "There the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest; the prisoners are at peace and do not hear the gaoler's voice; there the great and the small are equal and the slave is free from his master."

He paused again and asked:

"Do you know the parable of the rich and the poor?"

"What parable?"

"Shall I tell it you?"

"Do."

"There were two men in the world, a rich one and a poor one. The rich lived in luxury and the poor was wretched. They both died and the rich received an honourable burial and the poor was thrown away like a dead dog. And they both appeared before the judgment seat of Osiris. The works of the rich man were weighed and, behold, his evil deeds outweighed his good deeds. And they put him under a door so that the door hinge entered his eye and turned in it each time that the door opened or shut. The poor man's deeds were weighed, too, and, behold, his good deeds outweighed his evil deeds. And he was clothed in a robe of white linen, called in to the feast and placed at the right hand of the god."

"Quite, quite, quite. And to whom does the parable refer? To you and me?"

"No, to everyone. I have seen all the oppressions that are done under the sun and, behold, the tears of such as were oppressed and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no one to defend them. The poor are pushed off the roads, the sufferers are forced into hiding, the orphan is torn away from its mother's breast and the beggar is made to pay a pledge. Moans are heard from the city and the souls of the victims cry unto the Lord. . . ."

He raised his eyes to heaven and his face seemed to light up.

"Blessed is He who cometh in the name of the Lord! He shall come down like rain on the freshly cut meadow, like dew upon the withered fields. He

shall save the souls of the humble and the oppressors he shall lay low. All the peoples shall worship him. Behold He comes quickly!"

Khnum felt dreary; everything was as grey and dull as when the sun was eclipsed. And it was all Yubra's doing. He had called him to be judged and now it was as though Yubra were judging him, his master.

"Who comes? Who comes?" he cried with sudden anger.

Yubra did not answer at once. He looked at Khnum from under his brows as though again with mocking defiance.

"Second Osiris," he said quietly at last.

"What are you talking about, you fool? There is only one Osiris, there will be no second."

"Yes, there will."

"He must have heard from the Jews about their Messiah," Inioteph remarked, with a jeer.

Yubra glanced at him in silence and then said, lower still: "There has been no Son yet; the Son is to come."

"What? There has been no Son? Ah, you infidel! So it's against Him you have rebelled?" Khnum shouted furiously.

"The liver rushes to his head," his doctor used to say about these sudden fits of fury.

Turning purple he got up from his chair heavily, walked up to Yubra and, seizing him by the shoulder, shook him so that the old man staggered.

"I see through you, you rebel! Take care, I will have no nonsense."

"A slave's ear is on his back; a good whipping

would soon make him drop this folly," Inioteph incited him.

Yubra said nothing.

"Oh, the snake, he holds his tongue and lies low," Khnum went on, and bending still lower over him looked into his face, "What have I done to you? What have I done to you? Why do you hate me?"

Had Yubra answered simply "because you robbed me of Maïta," Khnum's anger might have died down at once: his heart would have risen against him and denounced him as at the Last Judgment. But Yubra answered slyly:

"I bear you no evil."

And he added so low that only Khnum heard him: "God shall judge between us."

"What do you mean? What are you thinking of?" Khnum began and broke off, unable to look his slave in the face; he understood it was not easy to take dead flies out of the fragrant ointment.

"Ah, you stinking dog!" he shouted, beside himself with fury: the liver rushed to his head. "You bear me no evil, but who is it informed against me, who told the king's spies that two images of Amon in my tomb have not been effaced? Tell me, who?"

"I have not told, but even if I had I would not have been to blame: it is the king's command that images of Amon should be destroyed," Yubra answered, it seemed to Khnum, with insolent defiance.

"So you try to threaten me, you dog! Wait a bit, I'll give it you!"

He raised his stick. It was a thick, heavy stick of acacia wood, hard as iron: had he brought it down on Yubra's head he would have killed him.

But God saved them both. Their eyes met and it was as though Maïta had looked at Khnum.

He slowly lowered the stick without touching Yubra's head, staggered and fell into his chair, burying his face in his hands. He was motionless for a few minutes, then he uncovered his face and said, without looking at Yubra:

"Away with you! Begone! You are not a slave to me any more. Untie his hands and let him go, no one is to interfere with him. I have pardoned him."

"Perhaps I was wrong," said Dio to Pentaur, as she walked with him across the garden to Tuta's boat in the canal. "Perhaps you Egyptians can rebel after all. . . ."

"You judge by Yubra?" Pentaur asked.

"Yes. Have you many such?"

"Yes, we have."

"Well, then, there is sure to be rebellion. How strange it is, Taur: you and I have just been disputing whether the Son had come already or is to come, and here is the same thing over again . . ."

"It is the same thing everywhere."

"And the rebellion is about this, too?" Dio asked.

"Yes, it is. You are glad?"

Dio did not answer, she seemed lost in thought. Pentaur paused, too, and then said:

"Perhaps the world will perish through this. . . ."

"Let it!" she answered, and it seemed to him that the fire of rebellion was already burning in her eyes. "Let the world perish if only He will come!"

IV

HE boat was brought to the gates of Khnum's garden by the Big Canal which united the southern part of the city with the north—Apet-Oisit, where the throne of the world, the Temple of Amon, stood.

Hearing that Tuta had put off his meeting with her for a few hours, Dio decided to pass these hours —perhaps the last—with Pentaur: she had not made up her mind yet whether she was going away the next day. She wanted, too, to say good-bye to Amon's Temple; she had grown to love this house of God, the largest and most beautiful in the world, because it was through it she had entered Egypt.

Surrounded by walls, three enormous sanctuaries of Amon, Khonsu, and Mut—the Father, the Son, and the Mother—towered above the endless multitude of low, grey, flat houses made of river mud, like swallows' nests. Within the walls there were copses, gardens, ponds, cattle-yards, cellars, granaries, breweries, perfumeries and other buildings, a town within the town, the City of God in the city of men.

During King Akhnaton's reign the place fell into decay: the holy enclosures had been destroyed, the treasuries robbed, the sanctuaries closed, the priests driven away and the gods desecrated.

Having reached by boat the holy Road of the

Rams, Dio and her nurse Zenra, stepped into a litter and Pentaur walked by their side.

Turning to the right into a by-road to the sanctuary of Mut, they entered it through the northern gates.

The sacred lake of the god Khonsu, Osiris the Moon, shone, crescent-shaped, with a silvery brilliance. The rosy granite of the obelisks, the black basalt of the colossi, the yellow sandstone of the pylons, the green tops of the palms, bathed in the molten gold of the afternoon sun, were mirrored in the water with such clearness that one could see every feather in the rainbow-coloured Falcons of the sun at the top of the pylons and every hieroglyphic in the multi-coloured inscriptions on the yellow sandstone; it was as though there were another world down there, the reverse of this one, exactly like it and yet quite different.

By the shores of the lake some sandpits had been dug, probably in order to defile the holy waters, and bricklayers were getting clay from them. The lake in those places was shallow, its slimy bottom could be seen and the stagnant water in the pools had a dull rainbow glitter on the surface. A huge statue of the god Amon, of dark-red sandstone, had been thrown near by, face downwards, and an ox, standing knee-deep in water, was scratching its mud-coated side against the sharp end of one of the two feathers in the god's tiara; the smell of the pig-sty came from the animal.

Next to the pits was a sanctuary of immemorial antiquity consecrated to two goddess-mothers, Hekit the Frog, and Tuart the Hippopotamus.

At the beginning of the world the divine Frog, the midwife, crawled out of the primæval slime and at once began to help all women labouring of child; she helped the birth of Khonsu-Osiris, the son of God; she helped every dead man to rise again and be born into eternal life. Tuart, the Hippopotamus, was as efficient a help in labour.

The copper doors of the sanctuary were locked and sealed, but in the entry the two goddesses were hidden from the king's spies in two vaulted niches in the wall, behind torn curtains. The huge frog made of green jade with kind and intelligent round eyes of yellow glass, was sitting on its cubical throne. The pig-faced Hippopotamus, in a woman's wig, was ferociously showing its teeth; made of grey obsidian, with hanging breasts and monstrous belly, it was standing on its hind legs, holding in its fore-paws the sign of eternal life—the looped cross Ankh.

A little girl of twelve, an Ethiopian, in the last stage of pregnancy, had placed a wreath of lotus flowers round the neck of the goddess and, kneeling before her, was ardently praying with childish tears for easy travail.

Zenra wanted to sacrifice to the mother-goddesses two turtle doves for Dio, that the virgin might at last become a mother.

They went into the portico. An old priestess, who looked rather like her goddess, the Frog, was bathing in a copper basin of warm water two sacred ichneumons, water animals something between a cat and a rat, beloved by the god of the floods, Khnum-Ra. After the bath the creatures ran away, playing; the male chased the female.

"Pew-pew-pew!" the priestess called them quietly and began feeding them out of her hands with bread soaked in milk, muttering a prayer about a propitious flood.

Then she went down to the lake and called:

"Sob! Sob! Sob!"

There was a splash at the other end of the lake and, thrusting out its shining, slimy black head, a huge crocodile, some nine feet long, sacred to Sobek, the god of the Midnight Sun, rapidly swam across in answer to the call. Brass rings with bells glittered on its front paws, there were rings in its ears and a piece of red glass was stuck into the thick skin of the head in the place of the ruby that had been stripped from it. The crocodile was so tame that it allowed its attendant to clean its teeth with acacia charcoal.

It crawled out of the water and stretched itself at the feet of the priestess. Squatting before it she fed it with the meat and the honey cakes brought by Zenra, fearlessly thrusting her left hand into the open jaws of the beast; her right hand had been bitten off by the crocodile while she was still a child.

"I wish it had eaten me altogether," the old lady used to say, "I then wouldn't have to see what is going on now."

She did not go on to say "under the apostate king."

To be devoured by a sacred crocodile was regarded as a most happy death: there was no need to embalm or bury the body—one went straight from the holy belly into paradise.

With motherly tenderness the old priestess stroked the monster on its scaly back, calling it 'Sobby,' 'little one,' 'ducky.' And it was strange to see the beast's pig-like eyes gleam with responsive affection.

"Well, how did you like our crocodile mother?" Pentaur asked Dio with a smile when they came out of the portico, leaving Zenra behind and telling the litter to go on.

"I liked her very much," Dio answered, smiling also.

"Does it make you laugh?"

"No. Your Mut and our Ma is the same Heavenly Mother who blesses all the creatures of the earth."

"How then could you . . . ." he began and broke off. But she understood 'how then could you have killed the god Beast?'

"Our secret wisdom teaches," he said hurriedly, in order to hide her confusion and his own, "that animals are nearer to God than men, plants are nearer to God than animals and the dust of the ground—Mother Earth—is nearer to God than plants; a mass of flaming dust, the sun, is the heart of the world—God."

"Doesn't he know this?" Dio asked.

"No," Pentaur answered, guessing that she was speaking of King Akhnaton, "if he knew he would not desecrate the Mother."

"Perhaps there is something that I, a childless virgin, don't know either," Dio thought.

From the sanctuary of Mut they walked towards the Temple of Amon, along the sacred road of the

Rams, huge creatures of black granite placed in a row on either side of the pathway. On the top of the head between the horns that curled downwards, each ram had the sun disc of Amon Ra, and between the doubled up front legs a tiny mummy of King Amenhotep, Akhnaton's father: the god-beast was embracing the dead king, carrying him, as it were, into eternal life.

It seemed to Dio they all looked at her as though they would say "Decide!"

They came up to the pylon—the huge gates shaped like a pyramid cut off at the top, with a rainbow-coloured sun disc with rays and high posts for flags; it stood at some distance from the Temple. On either side of it were two granite giants, exactly alike, representing King Tutmose the Third, Akhnaton's great-great-grandfather, the first world-conqueror. Wearing gods' tiaras, they were sitting on their thrones with their arms folded in everlasting rest, with an everlasting smile on the flat lips. Above them the wretched tatters of old flags fluttered on the broken posts. The birds nesting in the tiaras chirruped loudly, as though laughing, and the black faces of the giants were streaked with white.

Pentaur read aloud the hieroglyphic inscription on the gates—the words of the god to the king:

"Rejoice, my son, who hast honoured me. I give thee the earth in length and breadth. With a joyful heart pass through it as a conqueror."

And the king's answer to the god:

"I have made Egypt the head of all nations, for together with me it has honoured thee, god Amon on high."

From the way Pentaur read the inscription Dio understood that he was comparing the great ancestor with the insignificant descendant.

Passing through the gate, and leaving the road to the Khonsu sanctuary on their left, they came out into the square. Men of all classes—beggars, slaves and grand gentlemen—were standing there in separate groups without speaking, as though waiting for something, and when the town guards on duty went past looked at them sullenly from a distance. All was quiet, but Dio suddenly remembered: "Rebellion!"

Someone came up to Pentaur stealthily from behind. The man's woollen striped Canaan cloak, worn over the Egyptian white robe, his reddish goat's beard, the curly hair hanging down his cheeks, the prominent ears, hooked nose, thick lips and the hot glitter in his eyes, made Dio recognize him at once for a Jew.

Pentaur whispered something in his ear; the man nodded silently, glanced at Dio and disappeared in the crowd.

"Who is this?" Dio asked.

"Issachar, son of Hamuel, a Jewish priest of Amon."

"But how can an unclean Jew be a priest?"

"He is a Jew on his father's side, but an Egyptian on his mother's. Their prophet, Moses, was also a priest in Heliopolis."

"But why is he not shaven?"

Dio knew that all Egyptian priests shaved their heads.

"He is hiding from the king's spies," Pentaur answered.

"What did you speak to him about?"

"About your meeting Ptamose."

They came to the western gates of Amon's temple; the leaf gold that covered them glowed like fire in the light of the setting sun. Three words had been inscribed on them in hieroglyphics of dark bronze: "Amon, great spirit." The word Amon was effaced, but that made the other two words glorify the Unutterable the more.

Guards were standing by the closed and sealed gates. People going past knelt down and kissed the dust of the holy flagstones, praying in a whisper; they would be thrown into prison for calling on the name of Amon aloud.

Dio showed the chief of the guards the ring with Tutankhaton's seal and he let her and Pentaur through the side door of the gates.

They entered the inner court that had rows of such gigantic columns, shaped like sheaves of papyrus, that it was hard to believe they were the work of human hands: it seemed as though the Great Spirit had piled up these everlasting stones as a mute praise to himself, the Unutterable.

From the yard they came into a covered antechamber, where the daylight came sparsely from narrow windows right under the ceiling. There was sunshine in the yard, but here it was half dark already and the thick forest of columns, saturated with the fragrance of incense like a real forest smelling of resin, seemed all the more huge in the twilight.

And it was quiet as in a forest; only up at the top one could hear a faint tapping that sounded like woodpeckers. "Knock-Knock-Knock!"— and there was stillness, and then again: "Knock-knock-knock!"

Dio raised her eyes and saw masons hung up in hammocks on long strings, like spiders on cobwebs, hammering on the walls and the pillars up above.

"What are they doing?" she asked.

"Effacing Amon's name," Pentaur answered with a smile. Dio smiled, too; the knocking seemed to her absurd: how could one efface the name of the Unutterable?

As they went further into the temple the walls narrowed down, the ceilings grew lower, darker and more menacing, and at last an almost complete darkness enveloped them; only somewhere in the far distance a lamp was burning dimly. That was the Holy of Holies—Sehem, the tabernacle, cut out in a block of red granite, where in the old days a golden statuette of god Amon, a foot high, had been kept behind linen draperies—the sails of the holy boat. Now Sehem was empty.

A narrow passage led from it to another tabernacle where in the past Amon's great Ram, the sacred Animal—the living heart of the temple—lay on a couch of purple in clouds of the ever-burning incense. But now this tabernacle too was empty; people said that a dead dog's bones had been thrown into it to defile the holy place.

"He does not know God's darkness either?" Dio asked.

"No," Pentaur answered, understanding again that

'he' meant the king. "He knows that God is light, but he does not know that darkness and light go together. . . ."

He knelt down and Dio knelt beside him; he began to pray and she repeated after him:

"Glory to thee, who dwellest in darkness,
Amon, the Hidden,
Lord of the silent,
Help of the humble,
Saviour of those in hell!
When they cry aloud to thee,
Thou comest to them from afar,
Thou sayest to them 'I am here!'"

They bowed down to the ground and Dio felt that the hair on her head moved with awe: 'He is here!'

They left the temple through the eastern gates where the litter was waiting for them. They got into it and were carried to the small temple Gem-Aton—Sun's Radiance—which had only just been built by King Akhnaton.

It had taken a thousand years to build Amon's temple of huge blocks of rock, and this one had been built quickly of small stones; Amon's temple was dark and mysterious, and this one was all open and sunny. There were no divine images in it except Aton's disc, with rays like hands descending from it.

They entered one of the porticos, on the wall of which there was a bas-relief of King Akhnaton making a sacrifice to the Sun god.

Dio looked at it dumbfoundered. Who was it? What was it? A human being? No, it was some unearthly creature in human form. Neither a man nor a woman, neither an old man nor a child; a

eunuch, a decrepit still-born baby. The arms and legs were so thin that they seemed to be nothing but bone; narrow childish shoulders and wide, well-covered hips; a big belly; a huge head shaped like a vegetable-marrow, bent down under its own weight on a long thin neck, flexible like the stem of a flower; a receding forehead, a drooping chin, a fixed stare and the smile of a madman.

Dio gazed at this face, trying in vain to recall something. All of a sudden she remembered.

In the Charuk Palace near Thebes, where Akhnaton was born and spent his childhood, she had seen his sculptured head: a boy looking like a girl; an oval, egg-shaped face, childishly, girlishly charming, quiet and gentle as that of the god whose name is Quiet-Heart.

A man dreams sometimes a dream of paradise, as though his soul returned to its heavenly home; and long after waking he refuses to believe that it had only been a dream and is full of sadness and yearning. Such was the sadness in that face. The drooping eyelids were heavy as though with sleep, the long eye-lashes seemed wet with tears and the lips wore a smile—a trace of paradise—heavenly joy through earthly sadness, like sunshine through a cloud.

"Can it be the same face?" Dio wondered. As in delirium the beautiful face was distorted, grown decrepit and monstrous, and, most awful of all, one could still see that young face in this changed one.

"Well, don't you know him?" Pentaur whispered. There was horror in his voice and mockery, too—triumph over an enemy. "No, he is not easy to

recognize. But it is he, Joy of the Sun, Akhnaton!"

"How did they dare insult him like this!" Dio cried out.

"No one would have dared if he had not asked for it himself. It is he who teaches painters not to lie, not to flatter. 'Living in Truth'—Ankh-em-Maat—so he calls himself, and this is what truth is; he did not want to be a man, so this is what he has become!"

"No, that's not it, that's not it!" a voice said behind Dio.

She turned round and recognized Issachar, son of Hamuel. "No, that's not it. The deception is worse and more subtle!" he said looking at the face of the bas-relief.

"What deception?" Dio asked.

"Why, this: listen to the prophecy. 'As many were astonied at Him: His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men. And we hid our faces from Him. But He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him: and with His stripes we are healed.' Do you know of whom this has been said? . . . And who is this man? Accursed, accursed, accursed is the deceiver who said 'I am the Son'!"

Slowly, as though with an effort, he averted his eyes from the bas-relief and looking at Dio bent down to whisper in her ear:

"The high priest of Amon expects you to-day at the third hour after sunset." And covering his head with his cloak he walked out of the temple.

For a few minutes Dio stood as though spellbound.

She was so lost in thought that she did not hear Pentaur call her twice and when he gently touched her hand, she started.

"What is it? What are you thinking of?" he asked.

"I hardly know myself . . ." she answered, with a shy, as it were, guilty smile, and then added, after a pause:

"Perhaps we don't any of us know the most important thing about him. . . ."

She paused again and then cried with such agony that Pentaur thought she was like one dying of thirst and asking for water:

"Oh, if I only knew, if I only knew who he is!"

V

UTANKHATON had spread a rumour that he was the son of King Amenhotep IV, Akhnaton's father. Tuta's mother, Meritra, was one of the king's concubines for a day—he had numbers of such. Gossips said, however, that Tuta's father was not the king, but the king's namesake, Amenhotep, the chief of the Surveying Office. Thanks to his mother, Tuta had obtained, as a child, the rank of the prince's playfellow, and he rapidly made a career: royal chamberlain, chief fan-bearer on the right hand of the divine and gracious king, treasurer of the king's household, bread-giver of the Two Kingdoms, defender of Aton's faith and, finally, the king's son-in-law, husband of Ankhsenbatona, Akhnaton's twelve-year-old daughter.

No one could look up to heaven as devoutly as he did, whispering in a honeyed voice:

"Oh, how salutary is your teaching, kind Uaenra, the only Son of the Sun!"

Or compose such pious inscriptions for tombs: "Akhnaton, the Son of the Sun, rose early in the morning to lighten me with his light for I was zealous in carrying out his words," said one of those

inscriptions. "I have followed thee, O Lord Aton—Akhnaton!" said another.

This identification of the king with God seemed absurd and blasphemous, since everyone knew that Aton was the Father and the king the son. But when it was known that these words expressed the king's secret doctrine about the perfect unity of the Father and the Son, people marvelled at Tuta's cunning.

The courtiers vied with one another in trying to revile the old god Amon. But Tuta surpassed them all: he ordered for himself a pair of plaited sandals made of golden straps, with Amon's face on the soles so as to tread on the unholy one with every step he took. And everyone marvelled again—they understood that he would go far in those sandals.

Tuta had been sent to Thebes with the title of Viceroy to carry out the decrees about taking away burial grounds from the priests and desecrating the god Khonsu, Amon's Son.

When Dio came to the Viceroy's white house the old servant, who knew her, met her with low bows and wanted to tell His Highness at once about her. But hearing that Tuta was having lunch with the chief of the Lybian mercenaries, Menheperra, a man whom she disliked, she said she would wait and going into an inner room, lay down on a low day-couch. Watching the slanting pink oblongs cast by the setting sun on the white ceiling through the long narrow slits of windows high up on the wall she sank into deep thought, as in the antechamber of

Gem-Aton's temple: was she to go or not to go?

She grew tired of thinking and dozed. Two big flies were buzzing by her very ear as though disputing "to go or not to go?"

She woke up suddenly and grasped that it was not the buzzing of flies but a whisper, somewhere quite close to her ear. She looked round, but there was no one there. The whisper came from the next room, which was divided off by a latticed partition covered with a carpet; Egyptian rooms were sometimes arranged in this way for the sake of coolness. The speakers were probably sitting on the matting-covered floor just by the side of Dio's couch.

"This heartburn will be the death of me," whispered one of the voices, dignified and elderly.

"It's the goose's liver, father," answered the other voice, high-pitched and respectful. "Would you like some *telek*? There is nothing like it for indigestion; with lemon and cardamon it is most refreshing."

There was a sound of liquid being poured out.

"Have a drink too, Sparrow?"

"Your health, father!"

"Why do you call me 'father'?"

"Out of respect: you're my benefactor and that's as good as a father."

"It is a good thing you respect old people. And why do they call you 'Sparrow'?"

"Because I pick up a grain out of every bit of business like a sparrow out of a manure heap."

"Come now, don't be so modest about it: you must have grabbed 'the man with the pig' from the cemetery thieves the other day . . . ."

Dio remembered that a man holding a pig by the

tail was the hieroglyphic of lapis-lazuli, the Egyptian officials' favourite bribe—Hez-Bet: *hez*—to hold and *bet*—a pig, and that the tomb of the ancient King Saakerra had been robbed recently.

"And so I was saying, Ahmez, son of Aban, is a foolish man and no good will come of him," the old man's voice went on. "You may pound a foolish man in the mortar, but his foolishness will not leave him, and it is better to meet a savage bear in a field than a foolish man in the house!"

"But in what way is he foolish, father?"

"Why, because he never knows which way the wind is blowing. There is trouble brewing up in the town and the Lybian soldiers are mutinous because they haven't had their pay for the last six months. And he, the fool, is afraid of a rising, so he was delighted when the pay-money was sent the other day from the king's treasury and ordered it to be distributed straight away. But I was too sharp for him—I said nothing to him but kept back the money and at once reported the whole thing to His Highness the Viceroy. And what do you think? He thanked me, said 'well done,' patted me on the cheek and promised to get me a job in his service. What do you think of that now?"

"Splendid, father! There is no one like you for giving one a hint! . . . But if there really is a rising, it will be bad, won't it?"

"Bad for some and good for others. A fool burns in the fire and a clever man warms his hands at it. . . ."

The whisper became so low that Dio could not hear. Then it grew louder again:

"Impossible, impossible, father! Who could presume to do such a thing?"

"Do you know Issachar, son of Hamuel?"

"But he is a coward, it isn't for a dirty Jew like him to do it!"

"He is a coward, but he can work himself up to a frenzy. They are all like that, the Jews: they are cowards, but if it is anything to do with their God they are frantic. And it is not only he—he is merely the knife, and the hand that holds the knife is strong. Soon there will be things happening to make one dizzy, my lad."

"It is dreadful to think of, father."

"Don't be uneasy, Sparrow—you may be a falcon yet."

Dio listened with her heart beating so violently that she was afraid they would hear it behind the partition. She understood that a vile and evil plot was being hatched against the king—and she seemed to have a share in it; perhaps that was why she suffered so, unable to decide whether to go or to stay.

Suddenly there was a sound of footsteps in the next room—not in the one where they were whispering. Both halves of the door were flung open and a huge hunting-cat, half panther, glided in noiselessly like a shadow; behind it, as its guard of honour, came the runners, the fan bearers, the bodyguards, and, last of all, walking barefoot as noiselessly as the cat—shoes were taken off indoors—a slender and graceful young man of medium height, with an ordinary pleasant face. He was wearing a plain white robe, a smooth black wig, a broad necklace that

came half way down to his waist, and he held in his hand a long gilded wooden staff adorned with a golden figure of the goddess Maat—Truth. This was the King's son-in-law, the Viceroy of Thebes, the real or supposed son of King Amenhotep—Tutankhaton.

He walked up to a carved ivory and ebony chair that stood on a platform in between four pillars in the middle of the room, and sat down. Approaching him Dio knelt before him. He kissed her on the forehead and said:

"Rejoice, my daughter! The grace of the god Aton be with you! Leave us," he added, addressing his suite.

When all had gone out of the room he moved to the day couch and, half reclining on it, motioned to Dio to sit down beside him; but he did it unobtrusively so that there was no need for her to notice the gesture unless she chose to do so. She did not notice it and sat down opposite him on a folding chair with a seat of plaited leather straps.

The cat walked up to her and rubbed itself against her legs, thrusting its head between her knees and mewing loudly, unlike a cat. Dio disliked cats and especially this one: she fancied it was a huge, black, slimy reptile. The cat never left Tuta's side and followed him about like a shadow.

"Why are you sitting here alone? Why didn't you send in your name?" he asked in a low caressing voice that sounded like a cat purring.

"You had a visitor."

"It was only your admirer Menheperra. Was that why you did not come in?"

"Yes, it was."

"Ah, you wild creature! . . . Come here, Ruru," he called to the cat. "You have had enough of it?" he asked Dio.

"No, I don't mind," Dio said politely, but she would gladly have thrust the clinging creature away.

"It is marvellous," he said, smiling and looking at her in the peculiar masculine way she hated: 'just like spiders crawling about one's naked body,' she used to say about these looks. "One cannot get used to you, Dio! Each time I see you I cannot help marvelling at your beauty. . . . There, forgive me, I know you don't like it!"

The cat lifted its face and looked straight into Dio's eyes with its fiery pupils. She pushed it slightly away with her foot, afraid that the cat might jump on to her lap.

"Come now, you are being a nuisance!" Tuta laughed, seized the cat by its collar and, dragging it on to the couch, made it lie down, spanked it and said "Sleep!"

"Well, how do matters stand? Are you coming?" he began in a different and business-like voice. Stop, wait, don't answer at once. I am not hurrying you, but just think: what are you doing here, what are you waiting for? Learning our dances? What for? Dance in your own way—they will like it all the better. Foreign things are more fashionable with us nowadays than our own. . . ."

"I have decided . . ."

"Wait a minute, let me finish. I shall go away and you will remain alone here and in these times

you don't know from day to day what might happen. . . ."

"But I am coming!"

"Are you? Really? You won't play me false again?"

"No, now I want to go as soon as possible."

"Why so suddenly?"

She made no answer and asked:

"Are you going to-morrow for certain?"

"Yes. Why?"

"They say there may be trouble in the city."

"Oh, it's nothing. All will be over to-morrow. Of course it is a big town and there are many fools about; they may want to die for their puppet and then there is bound to be bloodshed, there is nothing for it. . . ."

Dio understood that puppet meant the image of the god Khonsu.

"And does the king know it?" she asked.

"Know what?"

"That there may be bloodshed."

"No, he does not know. Why should he know? That he might revoke the decree? If he revoked this one, others would still be in force. And what is one to do? There is no teaching the fools without bloodshed!"

He sat up suddenly, put his feet on the floor, moved up to her, took her by the hand and smiled in the ambiguous way, with a sort of wink, which, again, there was no need for her to notice unless she chose to.

"You know, Dio, I have long wanted to ask you,

why do you dislike me? I have always been a friend to you. Tammuzadad saved you, but I, too, have done something . . ."

Dio started and drew her hand away. Tuta pretended not to notice it and continued to smile.

"Why do you think? . . . ." she began, and broke off, blushing and looking down. As always when she was alone with him she felt stiff, awkward—as though she had done some wrong and been caught unawares.

"What do you want me for?" she asked suddenly, almost rudely.

"There, you treat me as you do Ruru: I am being nice to you and you push me away," he laughed good-humouredly. "What do I want you for? Feminine charm is a great power . . ."

"You want to get power through me?"

"Not through you, but with you!" he said quietly with deep emotion, looking straight into her eyes.

"And I want you because of him," he went on, after a pause. "He is very difficult to get on with; you will help me: you love him and so do I—we shall love him together. . . ."

She understood that he was speaking of King Akhnaton and her heart began to beat as violently as when she was listening to the whisper behind the partition. She felt that she ought to say something, but she was spell-bound as in a nightmare: she wanted to push away the clinging reptile and could not.

"You haven't been to see Ptamose yet, have you?" he asked suddenly, as though they had often spoken about it, while, as a matter of fact, they had never

exchanged a word on the subject. Once more he caught her unawares like a naughty little girl.

"What Ptamose?" she pretended not to understand, but did it so badly that she was ashamed of herself.

"Come, come!" he said, with the same winking smile. "I won't betray you, no one shall know of it. And even if they did know, what of it? I would send you to him myself. He is a wise old man, a sage. He will tell you everything; you will know what the war is about. Only babblers and court flatterers imagine that we have won already. No, it is not so easy to conquer the old faith. Our forefathers were not any stupider than we are. Amon—Aton: is the dispute about a letter only? No, about the spirit. And indeed Amon is the Great Spirit!"

When he had moved from the armchair to the couch he had taken with him the staff with the gold sandals strapped to it. All of a sudden Dio bent down, took up one of them, turned it sole upwards and pointed with her finger to the image of Amon.

"And what have you here, prince? 'Amon the Great Spirit'?" she asked, smiling with almost undisguised contempt, as though she were really talking to a 'reptile.'

"There, you have caught me!" he laughed, good-naturedly, again. "Ah, Dio, priestess of the Great Mother, you are still living on your Mountain and refuse to come down to the earth to us poor men. And yet one day you will come down, will get your feet muddy and bruise them against the stones and be glad even of such sandals as these. One must have mercy, my friend. Be sober and fast by your-

self, but eat with the glutton and drink with the drunkard. And as for the Great Spirit, I hope he will forgive me: my sandals won't hurt him!"

He went on speaking at great length of the secret wisdom of the chosen and the folly of the mob, of the greatness of King Akhnaton and of his loneliness—"he, too, does not come down to earth from the Mountain"—of their future triple alliance and of how he, Tuta, will help them both "to come down."

Dio listened and the same spell came over her—she could not awake or cry out.

"No, he is not stupid," she thought. "Or he is both stupid and clever, crude and subtle. Very strong—not he, though, but the one who is behind him. 'He is only a knife in the hand and the hand is strong.' He talks to me as to a child, and I expect he talks to the king in the same way; and perhaps he is right: we are children and he is grown up; we are 'not quite human' and he—quite. He is all for the world and all the world is for him. A man like that is certain to reign. You will be king over the mice, you cat! Akhnaton will disappear, Tutankhaton will remain. He will go through the ages in his Amon's sandals, trampling on the Great Spirit. And the kingdom of this world will be Tuta's kingdom!"

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," Tuta said.

The centurion of the palace guards came in and, kneeling down, handed Tuta a letter. He opened it and, after reading it, said:

"A chariot!"

When the centurion went out, he got up, walked

across the room in silence, then sat down in his chair, and resting his head on his hand, heaved a deep sigh.

"Ah, the fools, the fools! I knew there was bound to be bloodshed. . . ."

"Rebellion?" Dio asked.

"Yes, there's a rising on the other side of the river. It seems the Lybian mercenaries have joined the rebels." His face was sad, but joy was shining through the sadness.

Dio understood: the rising was the beginning and the end was the throne.

He got up and turning to the couch took up his staff, untied the sandals from it, put them on and said:

"Well, there is nothing for it, let us go and put down the rising!"

VI

HERE will be a great rebellion and the earth will be turned upside down like the potter's wheel." Recalling these words of the ancient prophet Ipuver, Yubra eagerly awaited the fulfilment of the prophecy. "What if it begins without me!" he thought, sitting in the pit. And when Khnum turned him out of the house he took a staff, slung a wallet behind his back and set off at random, looking as though he had been a homeless wanderer all his life.

He remembered his old friend Nebra, the boatman, and decided to go and see him at the Risit Harbour. But at the harbour he was told that Nebra had finished work and was having supper in a tavern next door, in the Hittite Square.

Yubra was tired; his legs ached with the stocks that he had been wearing. He sat down to rest on a heap of stones on the quay.

The sun was setting behind the bare yellow rocks of the Lybian Mountains, honeycombed with tombs. The low-lying meadows beyond the river and the City of the Dead, where the embalmers' cauldrons were perpetually boiling and black clouds of asphalt smoke rose in the air, were already in shadow; only by the funeral temple of Amenhotep, at the end of the sacred Road of the Jackals, the golden points of

two obelisks shone with a dull glow like smouldering candles.

The left bank was in shadow, but the right still lay in the evening sun, which threw a coppery red glow on the dark-skinned, naked bargemen who carried from the boats down the planks earthenware pots and sacks of styrax and balm from Gilead, Arabian sandal and myrrh, fragrant incense from Punt, and cloves—burnt offerings to the gods and ointments for the dead. The quay was saturated with the fragrant odours, but through the fragrance came the smell of a carcass thrown up by the river and lying on the bank. An emaciated dog, with ribs that stood out under the skin, was devouring it.

Suddenly two white eagles pounced on the carcass with loud flapping of wings and greedy cries. The dog, frightened, jumped away with a squeal, and watched them from a distance, its tail between its legs, its teeth bared in an angry growl, its body shaking with hungry envy.

But a still greater envy glittered in the eyes of a starving beggar woman, who had come in search of food from the province of the Black Heifer, where men were devouring each other in their hunger.

She put her wrinkled, black, charred-looking breast to the lips of the baby perched in a wicker basket behind her. It was biting and chewing it furiously with its toothless gums but could not suck out a single drop of milk, and, no longer able to cry, it only moaned.

"Bread, please, sir; I have had no food for three days!" the beggar woman moaned in a voice as small as her baby's, stretching out her hand to Yubra.

"I have none, my poor woman, forgive me," he said, and he thought 'soon the hungry will be filled.'

He got up and walked on. The woman followed him at a distance as a stray dog follows a passer-by with a kind face.

Alongside of them on the smooth road, specially made for carrying heavy weights from the harbour to the town, some fifteen hundred convicts and prisoners of war were dragging, by four thick cables, something like an enormous sledge with a huge granite statue of King Akhnaton that had just been brought down the river. The superintendent of works, an old man with a stern and intelligent face, looked like a dwarf as he stood on the knees of the giant statue seated on its throne; he clapped his hands, beating the measure of the song the men were singing and sometimes he shouted at them and waved his stick, driving all this mass of men as a ploughman drives a pair of oxen. In front of them a man was watering the road with a watering can so that the runners should not be set on fire by the friction.

The cable, taut like a string, cut into men's shoulders even through the felt pads; perspiration dropped from their faces bent low over the ground; their muscles were strained; the veins on their foreheads were ready to burst; their bones seemed to crack with the incredible effort. And the giant, at rest for ever with a gentle smile on the flat lips, was only slightly moved from time to time. A doleful song, accompanied by laboured breathing, broke out like a moan from a thousand breasts:

Heigh-ho, pull and drag, pull and drag!
Heigh-ho, step along, step along!
When we've pulled an inch or two
We'll have earned a drink of beer,
We'll have earned a loaf of bread.
On and on with steady tread!
Make the heavy burden fly.
Now, brothers, here we go!
Have another try—
O-ho!

"These, too, will not have long to suffer: the slaves shall be set free," Yubra thought.

From the road he turned into Teshub Street. This part of Thebes, by the Apet Risit harbour, was populated by the worshippers of the god Teshub—boatmen, carpenters, rope-makers and other working people, as well as by tradesmen and inn-keepers.

The dark grey huts, looking like wasps' nests, made of the river mud and reeds, were so flimsy that they came to pieces after a good rain. But it only rained once in two or three years and, besides, it cost next to nothing to build such a hut afresh. Not only the poor, but people of moderate means, lived in them, in accordance with the Egyptian wisdom: our temporal home is a hut, our eternal home is the tomb.

The walls giving on to the street had no windows, except a little one with a movable shutter in the front door for the porter; the name of the owner was written over it in coloured hieroglyphics. All the other windows were at the back. On the flat roofs could be seen the conical clay granaries and the wooden frames over the skylights, facing north, "wind-catchers" for catching the north wind—"the sweetest breath of the north."

The inn of Itacama the Hittite, where Nebra was having his supper, stood at the very end of Teshub street, not far from the Hittite Square.

Instead of a signpost there was over the door a clay bas-relief representing a Canaan labourer sucking beer through a reed from a jug, and an Egyptian woman, probably a harlot or a tavern keeper, sitting opposite him; the hieroglyphic inscription said: "He comforts his heart with the beer Haket, Heart's seduction."

As he was going into the tavern Yubra turned round to the beggar woman and called to her:

"Wait a minute, my dear; I will bring you some bread!"

But she did not hear: his voice was drowned by the song of two tipsy scholars. Thinking that he was driving her away she walked off. And the two scholars—one long and thin, nicknamed the Decanter, and another short and fat, the Beer-Pot, tumbled into the tavern nearly knocking Yubra down. Both were bawling with all their might:

"Little geese are fond of water
But to us wine is better.
We are a merry crew
Drunken scholars bold and true.
Sages may grow old with study
Our wisdom is to drink.
Give us beer, pale or ruddy
Then we have no need to think."

Yubra walked into the dark, low-pitched room full of smoke and the smell of cooking: Itacama was roasting a goose on a spit. All sorts of men of different races sat on the matting on the floor listening to two girls playing the kinnar and the flute;

some were throwing dice, playing chess and 'fingers' —guessing the number of fingers opened and closed very rapidly; others were eating out of earthenware pots with their fingers—each had a washing bowl by him—and sucking wine and beer through reeds.

When Nebra saw his friend Yubra, he came forward to embrace him—the old men were very fond of each other—and ordered a luxurious supper for him: lentil broth with garlic, fried fish, sheep's cheese, a pot of beer and a cup of pomegranate wine—*shedu*. As often happens in times of famine even poor people—as though to give themselves courage—liked being extravagant with their last farthings.

Before sitting down to supper Yubra thought of the beggar woman; he broke off part of a loaf and went outside. But she was no longer there and he returned to Nebra disappointed.

The beggar had walked down the street and turned the corner; she stopped there smelling newly baked bread. A middle-aged woman with a wrinkled, sickly and cruel face was squatting on the ground baking barley cakes: she did it by sticking thinly rolled-out paste on the outside of an earthenware pot filled with charcoal embers.

"Give me some bread, dear, I have had no food for three days!" the beggar moaned.

The woman raised her hard eyes to her:

"Go along! There is no end of you beggars tramping about; one can't feed you all."

But the beggar stood still, looking at the bread greedily. "Give me some, please, please!" she repeated, with frenzied, almost menacing entreaty,

and when the woman turned away to take some dough from another pot, she suddenly bent down and stretched out her hand.

"Ah, you plague of Canaan, you scorpion's sting, you snake, thief, robber, may you have no coffin for your body!" yelled the woman, striking her on the hand.

The beggar answered back, showing her teeth as the dog had done and retreating slowly, her eyes still fixed greedily on the bread.

The woman picked up a stone and threw it at her. The stone hit the beggar on the shoulder. She gave a dreadful dog-like howl and ran. The baby in the basket began to cry, but stopped at once as though realising that tears were of no avail now.

Running to Hittite Square, where there was the god Teshub's old timber chapel that looked like a log hut, she fell exhausted by a heap of sun-dried manure bricks for fuel. She leaned against them sideways uncomfortably: the basket was in the way but she had not the strength to take it off. The baby was so quiet that it did not seem to breathe; she had not the courage to see whether it was asleep or dead.

She suddenly remembered her neighbour in the province of the Black Heifer, a twelve-year-old child-mother who had stolen somebody else's baby, calmly cut its throat as though it had been a lamb, fed her own child with it and had some herself. "That's what I ought to have done," thought the beggar woman.

The pain in her stomach was gnawing her like a wild beast. She suddenly felt weak all over, melting

with weakness as it were. "I shall soon die," she thought, and remembered: "may you have no coffin for your body." She smiled: "no coffin—no resurrection . . . . Well, so be it! Eternal death—eternal rest . . ."

She, too, though in a different way than Yubra, felt that the world had turned upside down.

And in the tavern Yubra was whispering with his friend:

"Has it begun?"

"Yes. The other side of the River people are assembling already and walking about with the holy tabernacle, singing glory to Amon. And I expect it won't be long before they start here," Nebra answered, and added, after a pause: "But what is it to us? The rebellion is about their god—not ours."

"Never mind," Yubra said. "Whichever way it begins, the end will be the same: the earth will turn upside down—and glory be to Aton!"

"Don't talk so loud, brother—if they heard you they would give you a beating."

"No danger of that!" a stupid looking youth said, with a grin, lisping as though his tongue were too big for his mouth; he was Zia, the Carpenter, nicknamed the Flea. "It is all one to us—Amon or Aton. So long as bread is cheaper than fish let the rest go hang!"

"You are a stupid man, Flea!" said the cauldron maker, Min, a sullen and pompous old man, with colorless eyes that looked very light in his face black with soot. "Who is Amon's son, Khonsu? Why,

Osiris-Bata—the Spirit of Bread. If the Spirit leaves the earth, there will be no more bread and we will all perish like midges!"

"And is it true, mates," the Flea lisped, "that our dear golden Khonsu is to be melted into money to buy bread for the poor?"

"What is heavier than lead and what name has it, other than foolishness?" said Decanter, the scholar, looking at him with the self importance of a learned man.

"And are you going to eat that bread?" Min asked, also looking at Flea with contempt.

"I? It's all one to me! I will do what everybody else does," he answered, smiling cautiously and shrugging his shoulders.

"Everybody will eat it, everybody!" the consumptive little cobbler Mar said hurriedly, waving his hands and coughing. "The pig gulps down a baby and doesn't care—it goes on grunting just the same; and so the people will eat the god and say 'that's not enough, give us some more'!"

"Well, we shall indeed be scoundrels if we give away the holy image of god to be defiled!" cried a giant with the face of a child—Hafra, the blacksmith, striking his right fist on his left palm.

"There is one thing I can't make out," Min, the cauldron-maker said, sighing heavily. "We are told that the king is a god. How can one god rise against another?"

"It's not the king, but the high and mighty gentry, greedy bloodsuckers!" the cobbler again put in hurriedly, going off into a fit of coughing. He brought up some blood and went on:

"They ought to be hanged, the lot of them, like salt fish, on one string. And the chief mischief maker is Tuta, the purring cat—he ought to be the first to be hanged!"

"Mice burying the cat," said Min, smiling bitterly. "No, my man, there's no way of doing it. The gentry talk and the people are mute; he who has the sword has the word."

"A knife may be as good, but the trouble is that the hare has the knife in its paw but cannot move for awe! That's why the fat-bellied ride rough-shod over us. And if we weren't a set of fools we might do great things at a time like this!" said a short, thick-set, broad-shouldered man of forty, with a terribly disfigured but calm and intelligent face, who had been playing dice without taking part in the conversation. He was Kiki the Noseless, the thief who had lately plundered the tomb of the ancient King Saakerra and obtained thousands of pounds worth of leaf gold and precious stones off the king's mummy. He had been seized and brought to trial, but acquitted for a large bribe.

Kiki was an assumed name and no one knew what his real name was. It was rumored that in his youth he had committed an awful crime; he was punished by being buried up to his neck in the ground, but by a miracle he escaped and ran away; then he became the chief of a robber band in the marshes of the Delta, was caught, had his nose cut off by the hangman and was deported to the gold mines in Nubia; he escaped and became a brigand once more; was seized again and sent to the copper mines of Sinai, escaped again and, after hiding for

some time, appeared in Thebes just before the mutiny under the name of Noseless Kiki.

As soon as he spoke everyone was silent and turned to him. But he went on playing dice, looking as though all that was being said here were empty babble.

The musicians who had stopped for a moment began strumming the kinnar and playing the pipe again. The scholars struck up a drunken song. It had grown dark. They lighted a copper lamp suspended from the ceiling and filled with evil smelling vegetable oil, and on the floor earthenware lamps with mutton fat.

"Zen is speaking, Zen is speaking! Listen!" voices were heard suddenly.

Zen—or Zennofer—a man of thirty with a sad, gentle and sickly face and dreadful cataract on his blind eyes, was a junior priest 'uab' in the sanctuary of the god Khonsu-Osiris. He was reputed to be a seer because he knew by heart the writings of the ancient prophets and himself had visions and heard voices.

The musicians were told to stop, the drunken scholars were pushed out into the street and in the stillness that followed the gentle voice of the prophet sounded as though coming from a distance.

"To whom shall I tell of my sorrow? Whom shall I call to weep?" he spoke as though crying in his sleep. "They do not hear, they do not see, they walk in darkness; the foundations of the earth are shaking and there is no wise man to understand and no foolish man to bewail it!"

Suddenly he stretched out his arms and cried in a

loud voice: "So it has been and so it shall be, so it has been and so it shall be! There shall be endless evil. The gods will grow weary of men; the gods will forsake the earth and go to heaven. The sun will be darkened, the earth will be waste. The flowers of the fields will set up a moan, the heart of the beasts will weep for men; but men will not weep—they will laugh with sorrow. An old man will say 'I would I were dead,' and the child 'That I had not been born!' There will be a great mutiny throughout the earth. The towns will say 'let us drive out the rulers!' The mob will rush into the courts of judgment; the scrolls of the law will be torn, records of estates scattered, the boundaries between fields wiped out, the frontier posts knocked down. Men will say 'nothing is private, all things are in common; other people's things are mine; I take what I like!" The poor will say to the rich, 'Thief, give me back what you have stolen from me.' The small will say to the great 'all are equal!' Those who have not built the houses will live in them; those who have not tilled the land will fill the granaries; those who have not woven will be clothed in fine raiment, and she who looked at her own reflection in water will now gaze at herself in a mirror. Slaves will wear gold, pearls and lapis-lazuli, and the mistress will go in rags, begging for bread. The beggars will be as gods and the earth will turn upside down as does a potter's wheel!"

Suddenly he stood up and fell on his knees, raising his blind eyes to the sky as though he already saw the things of which he was speaking.

"So it has been and so it shall be—there shall be

a new heaven and a new earth. There the lion shall lie down with the lamb and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp and the weaned child put his hand on the cockatrice's den. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! He will come down like rain on a freshly mown meadow, like dew upon the parched fields. Lo, He cometh!"

He stopped and all were silent. "That's all nonsense," the Noseless Kiki's voice was suddenly heard in the stillness. "Why do you listen to a fool's talk?"

"And why do you revile God's prophet, you dog?" said Hafra the blacksmith, laying his hand on Kiki's shoulder so heavily that Kiki staggered. Freeing himself with an agile movement, he seized the knife that hung at his waist; but glancing at the giant's childish face he evidently changed his mind and said calmly, with a twinkle in his eye,

"Very well, if he is a prophet, let him tell us when this is to be?"

"For such as you—never; but for the saints—soon!" Zen answered.

"Soon? You are wrong there. No, brother, it will take a good long time for fools to grow wise."

"But do you know when it shall be?" Hafra asked.

"Yes, I do."

"Tell us then, don't beat about the bush!"

"Do you remember the inscription on King Una's tomb?" asked Kiki, the same mocking smile in his eyes.

Zen said nothing, as though he had not heard the question, but his face quivered like the face of a child in a fit of terror.

Yubra, too, was trembling: he felt that the fate of the world were being decided by this argument between the saint and the criminal. The blacksmith scowled more and more menacingly.

"You have forgotten? Well, I'll remind you," Kiki went on. "Once upon a time, very long ago, there lived a king called Una. He was a clever man, cleverer than anybody in the world, but he was a brigand, a thief, a scoundrel, no better than we are. He died and was buried and they put over his tomb the inscription he told them to write: 'The bones of the earth are cracking, the sky is shaking, the stars are falling, the gods are trembling: King Una, the devourer of gods comes forth from his tomb and goes hunting; he sets traps and catches the gods; he kills them; stews them, roasts them, and eats them; big ones for breakfast, middle-sized for dinner, little ones for supper, and old gods and goddesses he uses to make fragrant incense. He devoured them all and became the god of gods.'"

"What rubbish is this, you fool? Speak straight, don't wriggle!" cried Hafra, clenching his fists in a fury.

"Have it straight, then: it won't be soon, but the hour will come when the poor and wretched will say 'we are no worse than King Una, the devourer of the gods.' Scoundrels, pickpockets, brigands, dirty Jews, men with torn nostrils, the flogged, the branded, the cursed will say 'we are nothing—let us be everything! Then the earth will turn upside down and *he* will come . . ."

"Who is he?" Hafra asked.

"God and devil, the Blacky-whity, two gods in one!"

"Stop or I'll kill you!" the blacksmith shouted, raising his fist.

Kiki jumped back and pulled out his knife. There would have been a fight but shouts came from the street:

"They are coming! They are coming! They are coming!"

"Rebellion!" the cobbler was the first to guess what had happened and rushed to the door. All the others followed him.

There was a crush. The Flea was pressed to the wall and nearly suffocated. Min was knocked down. Hafra stumbled against him and fell down, too. Kiki jumped over both and, whistling like a brigand, shouted: "Have you got any knives?"

"Yes," someone in the street shouted back. Everyone was running in one direction—from the Risit Harbour to the Hittite Square.

It was dark; the moon had not yet risen; the stars twinkled in the sky and there was the red glow of a fire on the horizon.

VII

EOPLE were crowded in the Square. In the vague hubbub of voices one could distinguish at times the phrases: "Glory be to Amon on High! Glory be to Khonsu, Amon's Son!" Suddenly there came the sound of melodious singing, far off at first and then nearer and nearer. The Square was lit up with the red glow of the torches and a solemn procession appeared.

The Lybian mercenaries walked in front followed by fan-bearers and censer-bearers; then came the *horemhebs*—officiating priests, and finally twenty-four senior priests—*neteratephs,* with shaven heads, leopard skins across the shoulder and wide, stiffly starched white skirts. Walking twelve in a row they carried on two poles the holy tabernacle—Userhet—a boat of acacia wood with linen curtains like sails, that hid a figure of Amon a foot high. Its shadow could be seen through the fine material in the flickering light of the torches: but people did not dare to look even at the shadow of the god: to see him was to die.

A crowd followed the tabernacle, singing in a chorus:

"Glory be to Amon on High
Glory to Khonsu, Amon's son!
Exalt ye them above the heavens,
Exalt ye them above the earth.
Proclaim to all their glory!
Tell men to fear the Lord
Throughout all generations,
Tell it to the great and small,
To every creature that draws breath.
To fishes and fowls of the air;
Tell those who know not and who know:
'Fear ye the Lord!'"

Yubra sang, too, saying 'Aton' instead of 'Amon'; no one heard him in the general chorus. And sometimes he made a mistake, glorifying the god of his enemies and rejoiced: he knew that where they were going there would be no more enemies; the lion and the lamb would lie down together and the child would play on the hole of the asp.

The beggar woman from the province of the Black Heifer walked by Yubra's side. He had found her half-dead with hunger by the heap of manure-bricks in the Square, restored her to life and given her some food: Nebra procured bread for her and milk for the baby from a boatman friend of his. When she had eaten and seen that the baby was alive and sucking a comforter that Yubra cleverly made for it, she revived and followed him as a dog follows the man who has given it food. She followed him in the procession, too.

He was holding her firmly and kindly by the hand, as though he were leading this sorrowful and perishing daughter of the earth to the new earth, to the Comforter. She understood but vaguely what was going on, and not daring to look at the shadow of the

god behind the veil, simply repeated with the rest of the crowd:

"Glory be to thee, god of mercy,
The Lord of the silent,
The help of the humble,
The saviour of those in hell!
When they call unto thee
Thou comest to them from afar
Thou sayest to them 'I am here.'"

She, too, was in hell; perhaps He would come to her, too, and say 'I am here,' she thought joyfully, as though knowing that in the place where they were going there would be no famine and the mothers would not have to steal other people's children and kill them like lambs in order to feed their own.

Pentaur was walking on the left in the first row of the twelve priests, neteratephs, who carried the tabernacle. Yubra saw him and they looked at one another. "How did you come here, servant of Aton? Are you a spy?" Yubra read the question in Pentaur's eyes. "Come, there can be no spies now! We are all brothers," was the answer in Yubra's eyes, and Pentaur seemed to understand—he smiled at him like a brother.

Zen, the prophet, was also with the crowd; a little boy was leading him by the hand. His face was sorrowful unto death: maybe he knew that Kiki was right and that the earth would turn upside down only in order thata the worst might come.

After passing Coppersmiths' Street they came into the sacred Road of the Rams. At the very end of it the dull red disc of the moon, cut across by the black needle of the obelisk, like a cat's eye by the

narrowed pupil, was slowly rising behind the sanctuary of Mut.

Suddenly the procession stopped. The blast of trumpets and the rattle of drums was heard in front; arrows and stones from slings flew about with a hissing sound: it was an ambush of the Nubian soldiers sent against the rebels.

One arrow struck the foot of the tabernacle. The priests lowered it to the ground; men crowded round it, defending the body of the god with their own bodies.

The attack of the Nubians was so violent that the Lybian mercenaries flinched and would have run away had not help arrived just in time.

Kiki, with a few desperadoes like himself, had gone from the Hittite Square to the raised road where the workmen, who had been dragging the giant statue of King Akhnaton during the day, had gone to sleep, some on straw and others on the bare earth. Kiki could not wake many of them: they slept so heavily that if the very earth under them had caught fire they would hardly have wakened. But he did rouse some three hundred by the mere cry of 'Plunder!'; leading them against the Nubians' ambush he attacked it from behind and so won the battle for the rebels.

The procession moved on with a song of victory:

> "Woe to be to thine enemies, Lord!
> Their dwelling place is in darkness,
> But the rest of the earth in thy light.
> The sun of them that hate thee is darkened,
> The sun of them that love thee is rising!"

Reaching Amon's temple they walked past it and turned to the right, to Khonsu's sanctuary, easily

scattering a small detachment of Midian archers on the way. But at the sanctuary they learned that at the first news of mutiny the golden figure of Khonsu had been removed and hidden in the treasury of Amon's temple.

"Come, good people, you have been saving the god long enough, it is time you thought about yourselves!" Kiki the Noseless shouted to the crowd, jumping on the empty pedestal of Khonsu's statue. "There is nothing to be got here, Aton's rabble have cleared the place, but on the other side of the river in the Charuk Palace there is still plenty of stuff left. Let's make for the river, mates!"

There arose a dispute, almost a fight, as to what they were to do—save the god or plunder.

As Yubra listened, he grew uneasy: was this what he had been hoping for or something utterly different?

After much wrangling the crowd divided into two: the bigger part went to the other side of the river with Kiki and the smaller set out towards Amon's temple.

Pentaur led them. Expecting another ambush they put out the torches. Men walked in silence, with stern faces; they knew that perhaps they were going to their death. "We shall all die for Him!" Yubra thought, with quiet joy.

When they reached the temple they saw there were no guards there. Two granite colossi and two obelisks, as though keeping watch, threw black, menacing shadows on to the square of white stone bathed in moonlight.

Pentaur and Hafra, the blacksmith, walked up to

the temple gates; the gold, with the hieroglyphics of dark bronze upon it, the two words 'Great Spirit,' dimly glistened in the moonlight.

"Hack them!" Pentaur said.

Hafra raised the axe, but let it down again, not daring to strike. Pentaur seized the axe from him and cried:

"Lift up your heads, oh ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in!"

He lifted the axe and struck; the ponderous echo rolled through the empty, resonant air behind the gates, as though the Great Spirit himself had answered him.

"Acheans, Acheans, the devils!" was heard in the crowd.

Acheans, the half-savage mercenaries from the North, had just arrived in Egypt to serve the king. They had come straight to the City of the Sun, and were hardly known at Thebes, but there were terrible rumours about their ferocity and mad courage.

Rushing out from three ambushes at once they surrounded the crowd on all sides, pressing it to the walls of the temple so that escape was impossible. And above the gates on the flat roof of the temple copper helmets and spears were glistening, too. Ethiopian slingers were ambushed there. Arrows, stones and lead fell from there like hail.

Pentaur raised his eyes and saw just above him, in a narrow window of the temple wall, a boy of fifteen, with a black monkey-like face, white teeth bared like those of a beast of prey, and two feathers, a green and a red one, stuck aslant in the black frizzy

hair. Placing an arrow on the bowstring, he aimed at Pentaur slowly bending a huge bow made of rhinoceros bone.

Pentaur remembered the tame monkey on the top of the palm tree over Khnum's house, throwing the shells of the pods at the sleeping dancer, Miruit, and he smiled. He might have jumped behind the projecting wall, but he thought "what for? I shall be killed anyway, and it is good to die for Him Who has been!"

The bowstring sounded.

"Has been or will be?" he had time to ask and to answer: "Has been, is and will be," while the arrow whistled through the air. Its copper sting pierced him just under the left breast. He fell on the threshold of the closed gates. For him the gates lifted their heads, the everlasting doors were lifted up and the King of Glory came in.

Standing by the tabernacle Yubra was watching the last batch of the Lybians fighting. Suddenly the leaden bullet from a sling struck him on the temple. He fell and thought he was dying. But a minute later he propped himself up on his elbow and saw that the Achean devils were hacking the tabernacle.

The white curtains flapped like broken wings laying bare the small, worm-eaten, wooden figure of the god, blackened with the smoke of incense, polished with the kisses of the worshippers. A soldier seized it, and lifting it up, flung it upon the ground and trampled it underfoot. The god's body cracked like a crushed insect.

Yubra fell upon his face so as not to see.

Pentaur was dying happily. Some one gentle as the god whose name is Quiet-Heart was bending over him—he could not tell whether it was a boy who looked like a girl or a girl who looked like a boy. He wanted to ask 'Who are you?' when the kiss of eternity sealed his lips. And the dulcet chords played on:

"Death is now to me like sweetest myrrh,
Death is now to me like healing,
Death is now to me like refreshing rain,
Death is now to me like a home to an exile!"

VIII

HEN Dio had set out to see Ptamose the mutiny was just beginning beyond the river and all was quiet on this side.

Issachar was waiting for her by the Eastern Gates of the Apet-Oisit wall, where the deserted tomb-sanctuary of King Tutmose the Third lay in ruins. Stepping out of the litter and telling the bearers to wait for her at the gate, she went with Issachar into the half-destroyed porch of the sanctuary. Walking up to the wall, which was completely covered with bas-reliefs and mural paintings, he leaned his shoulder against it. A movable stone turned on its axis, revealing a dark narrow opening. They both squeezed themselves sideways through it and descended some steep steps cut in the thickness of the rock. Issachar walked in front of Dio down a slanting underground passage, carrying a torch.

It was close: the depths of the earth warmed through by the eternal Egyptian sun, never cooled; the darknes was filled with warmth. "Glory be to thee who dwelleth in darkness, O Lord!" Dio remembered. It seemed to her that here the dead were as warm lying in their tombs in the bosom of the earth as a child in its mother's womb.

The endless mural paintings represented the journey of the Sun-god down the subterranean Nile: the sail of the boat hung limply in the breathless stillness and the dead oarsmen were dragging it over dry land through the twelve caves—the twelve hours of the night, from the eternal night to the eternal morn.

The hieroglyphic inscriptions glorified the Midnight Sun, Amon the Hidden.

> "When thou descendest beyond the sky
> The most secret of secret Gods,
> Thou bringest light to them who are in death.
> Glorifying thee from within their tombs,
> The dead lift up their arms
> And those under the earth rejoice."

The main passage was intersected by side passages. Suddenly the red flame of torches and the black shadows of men carrying spears, swords, bows and arrows flitted across them.

"Where are they carrying the arms?" Dio asked.

"I don't know," Issachar answered reluctantly.

"It must be the rebels in the town," she guessed.

Supplies of arms and also of gold, silver and lapis-lazuli—remnants of the temple treasuries concealed from the king's spies were hidden in these subterranean recesses of Amon's temple. It was all kept there for the day of rebellion against the apostate king.

Turning into one of the side passages and walking to the end of it, they stopped at a closed door in the wall. Opening it, Issachar walked in, lit a lamp with his torch and said, putting the lamp on the floor:

"Wait here, they will come for you."

"And where are you going?" Dio asked.

"To fetch Pentaur."

"Good, bring him here!" she said joyfully: she had been thinking about him all the time.

Issachar went out, closing the door after him.

Dio looked round the empty vaulted cell, long and narrow like the tomb—and perhaps indeed it was one. The walls were covered from top to bottom with hieroglyphic script and pictures.

She sat on the floor and waited. Tired of sitting still she got up and, taking the lamp, began looking at the mural paintings and reading the hieroglyphics. She was so absorbed in this that she did not notice the passage of time.

Suddenly the flame grew dim, gave a last flicker and went out. Walls of stifling, black, and, as it were, tangible darkness, closed in upon her. She was afraid of being left and forgotten in this coffin.

She fumbled her way to the door and began knocking and calling. She listened: a deadly stillness. She felt more frightened than ever. All of a sudden she recalled Pentaur and the fear left her: if he was alive he would come.

She sat down again, leaning her back against the wall and remained so. A strange stillness came over her; she did not know whether it was dream or waking. She was filled with the black, warm, sunny darkness as a vessel is with water. With quiet ecstasy she whispered the words she had just read in the hieroglyphic inscriptions, spoken by the dead man to the Midnight Sun, the hidden god:

"He is—I am; I am—He is."

And it seemed to her that she herself were dead and lying in the bosom of the earth like a child in its

mother's womb, waiting for resurrection—birth into eternal life. And the dulcet harpstrings sang

"Death is now to me like sweetest myrrh. . . ."

All of a sudden a light flashed into her eyes. A bent, decrepit old man with a torch—a priest, to judge by his shaven head and the leopard skin thrown over his shoulder—stooping over her, took her by the hand, helped her up and led her out of the room.

"Who are you? Where are you taking me?" she asked. He said nothing and was about to lead her down some more steep narrow stairs.

"No, I don't want to go down," she said. "Take me up. Where is Pentaur? . . . . Why do you say nothing? Speak."

The old man made an inarticulate sound and, opening his mouth, showed her a stump in place of a tongue; he explained by signs that Pentaur would come down too and that somebody was expecting her. She understood that he meant Ptamose.

They walked further down. Again Dio did not know whether she was asleep or awake. The dumb man had such a dead face that it seemed to her Death itself was leading her to the kingdom of death.

They stopped at a closed door. The dumb man knocked. Someone from within asked "Who is there?" and when Dio said her name the door was opened.

In a low sepulchral chamber or sanctuary, supported by four quadrangular columns, cut out in the thickness of the rock, stood a sepulchral couch,

with a mummy in a white shroud lying on it. There was, Dio thought, something terrible in its face—more terrible than death.

Her dumb guide took her past the couch into the depths of the chamber, where a vaulted niche, lined with leaf-copper, glowed, like sunset, in the light of innumerable lamps. There, in the smoke of fragrant incense, a huge black lop-eared Lybian ram—probably transferred from the upper temple—lay asleep on a couch of purple. This was the sacred animal, "the bleating prophet," the living heart of the temple.

A girl of thirteen—not an Egyptian to judge by her fair hair and skin—lay beside it, with her head on the animal's back and her eyes half-closed, like a bride on the bed of love. Completely naked, but for a narrow girdle of precious stones below the navel, shameless and innocent, she stretched herself out, pale and white on the black fleece, like a narcissus, the flower of death. She was one of the twelve priestesses of the god Ram—Amon-Ra.

At the approach of Dio, the little girl opened her eyes and looked at her intently. There was something so mournful in that look that Dio's heart was wrung; she remembered another victim of the god Beast—Pasiphae-Eoia.

Her dumb guide prostrated himself before the Ram. A young priest, with an austere meagre face, kneeling next to Dio, was burning fragrant incense in a censer.

'Bow down to the god!" he whispered, looking at her severely.

Dio looked at him, too, but said nothing and did not bow to the beast, though she knew it was dangerous—they might kill her for impiety.

When the girl opened her eyes and moved the Ram woke up and also moved slowly and heavily: one could see it was very old, almost at its last gasp. It opened one eye: the pupil, fiery-yellow like a carbuncle, glowed menacingly from under a dark heavy eyelid, with grey lashes, and looked into her eyes with an almost human look.

"The god opens his eye, the sun, and there is light in the world," the priest whispered the prayer.

When he had finished he got up, and taking Dio by the hand led her to the couch with the mummy. He bent down to the dead man and whispered something in his ear. Dio drew back horrified: the dead man opened his eyes.

His deathly, skeleton-like body, brown as a withered tree, showed through the transparent white of the winding sheet. The veins on the shrunken temples stood out as though stripped of flesh; the thin, thread-like lips of the sunk-in mouth and the gristle of the hooked nose—a vulture's beak—looked deathly under the tightly drawn shiny skin. But living, young, immortal eyes seemed to haave been set in that mask of death.

The priest reverently lifted the mummy and raised its head on the couch. The dead lips opened and whispered, rustling like dry leaves.

"Listen, the Urma is speaking to you."

It was only then Dio grasped that this was the great seer—*urma,* watcher of the secrets of heaven

and the prophet of all the gods of north and south, the high priest of Amon, Ptamose.

He was over a hundred years old—an age not infrequent in Egypt. Many people thought that he had long been dead, for during the last ten years, ever since the apostate king began to persecute the faith of his fathers, Ptamose had been hiding in subterranean hiding-places and tombs; some of those who knew him to be alive said that he would never die, while others asserted that he had died and risen again.

Dio knelt down and bending over the low couch put her ear close to the whispering lips.

"You have come at last, my dear daughter! Why have you delayed so long?"

There was an insidious caress in his voice, a magnetic power in his eyes.

"Pentaur has told me much about you, but one cannot tell all about others. Tell me yourself now."

He began asking her questions, but he seemed to know all before she had answered him and to read her heart as an open scroll.

"You poor, poor child!" he whispered when she told him how Eoia and Tammuzadad had perished through her. "To destroy those whom you love—that's your misery. Do you know this?"

"Yes, I do."

"Mind then that you don't destroy him also."

'Whom?"

"King Akhnaton."

"Well, if I do destory him so much the better for you!" she said with a forced smile.

The shadow of a smile flitted in the eyes of the old man, too. "Do you think I am his enemy? No; God knows I am not lying—why should a dead man lie?—I love him as my own soul!"

"Why then did you rise against him?"

"I rose not against him but against Him who comes after him."

"The Son?"

"God has no Son."

"How can the Father be without the Son?"

"All are the Father's sons. Great in His love he gives birth to the gods and gives breath to the baby bird inside the egg, preserves the son of a worm, feeds the mouse in its hole and the midge in the air. The son of a worm is God's son, too. Stones, plants, animals, men, gods—all are his sons; He has no only Son. He who has said 'I am the Son' has killed the Father. *Ua-en-ua,* one and only is He and there is none other beside. He who says 'there are two gods' kills God. This is whom I have risen against—the deicide. He will save the world, you think? No, He will destroy it. He will sacrifice himself for the world? No, He will sacrifice the world to himself. Men will love Him and hate the world. Honey will be as wormwood to them, light as darkness, life as death. And they will perish. Then they will come to us and say 'Save us!' And we will save them again."

"Again? Has it all happened before?"

"Yes. It has been and it will be. Do you know the meaning of *Nem-ankh,* eternal recurrence? Eternity spins round and round and repeats its cycles. All that has been in time shall be in eternity. *He*

has been, too. His first name was Osiris. He came to us but we killed Him and destroyed His work. He wanted to make His kingdom in the land of the living but we drove Him to the Kingdom of the dead, Amenti, the eternal West: we gave Him that world and kept this one for ourselves. He will come again and we will kill Him once more and destroy His work. We have conquered the world and not He."

"There is no Son and perhaps there is no Father either?" Dio asked, looking at him defiantly. "Tell me the truth, don't lie: is there a God or no?"

"God is—there is no God; say what you like—it all comes to nothing; all men's words about God are vain."

"There now! I have caught the thief!" Dio cried, laughing into his face. "I knew all along you did not believe in God."

"Silly girl!" he said, as gently and kindly as before, "I am dead: the dead see God. I adjure you by the living God, consider before you go to Him whether there isn't truth in my words!"

"And if there is, what then?"

"Leave Him and stay with us!"

"No, even then I shall remain with Him!"

"You love Him more than the truth?"

"More."

"Go to Him, then, to the tempter, the son of perdition, the devil!"

"It's you who are the devil!" she cried, raising her hand as though she would strike him.

The dumb man rushed up to her, seized her by the arm and raised a knife over her.

"Leave her alone!" Ptamose said, and the old man drew back.

Suddenly there was a sound of bleating, low as the weeping of a child but old and feeble: it was the Ram. Ptamose looked at the animal and the animal at him and they seemed to understand each other.

"The Great One foretells woe, woe to the earth with its bleating!" the old man exclaimed, raising his eyes to Dio. "Go up—you will see what He is doing. It has begun already and will not end until He comes!"

Then he glanced at the dumb priest and said:

"Take her upstairs and don't molest her, you answer for her with your life!"

He shut his eyes and again looked like one dead.

Dio was running upstairs, with one thought only in her mind: "Where is Pentaur, what has happened to him?"

Going out of the catacomb by the same door as she had entered, she went past the ruins of Tutmose's tomb and walked along the south wall of Amon's temple. On the white stones of the temple square, bathed in moonlight, dead bodies lay about as on a battlefield. Half-savage, hyena-like dogs were worrying them. An emaciated looking dog, with a blood-stained mouth, was sitting on its hind legs howling at the moon.

Dio stopped suddenly. The needle of the obelisk showed black against the moonlit sky: the hieroglyphics on the mirror-like polished surface of its granite glorified King Akhnaton, the Joy of the Sun,

and someone was sitting hunched up against the base of it—dead or alive Dio could not make out. She came nearer and, bending down, saw a dead woman, thin as a skeleton, stiffly pressing a dead baby to her wrinkled, black, charred-looking breasts, as she gazed at it with glassy eyes; her white teeth were bared as though she were laughing. It was the beggar woman from the province of the Black Heifer.

Dio recalled a black granite figure she had once seen of the goddess Isis, the Mother with her son Horus, and it suddenly seemed to her that this dead woman was Mother Isis herself, accursed and killed —by whom?

"Go up, you will see what He is doing," the words of Ptamose sounded in her ears.

She turned round at the sound of footsteps. Issachar came up to her.

"Where is Pentaur? What has happeened?" she cried, and, before he had time to answer, she understood from his face that Pentaur had been killed.

The familiar pain of inexpiable guilt, insatiable pity pierced her heart. "To destroy those whom you love—that's your misery," the words of the seer sounded in her ears again.

It took her some time to grasp what Issachar was saying; at last she understood: they would not give Pentaur's body to him, but perhaps they might give it to her.

She followed him. A cordon of sentries guarded the approach to the gates of Amon's temple. The centurion recognised Dio: he had seen her at the Viceroy's white house; he let them both through and told the soldiers to give her Pentaur's body.

He was lying where he had been killed—by the threshold of the western gates. Their gold with the hieroglyphics of dark bronze—two words 'Great Spirit'—dimly glittered in the moonlight.

Dio knelt down, and looking into the dead man's face, kissed him on the lips. Their cold penetrated down to her very heart.

"It is my doing—His doing," she thought and the word 'He' had a double meaning for her: he—the king, and He—the Son.

IX

Dio was watching the fire beyond the River from the flat roof of Khnum's house. Charuk Palace was burning—the residence of the Viceroy Tutankhaton.

Built of very old dry cedar and cypress wood, it burned hotly and steadily like a resin torch. The bare crags of the Lybian Mountains above it glowed as though red hot; the flames were reflected in the river as a pillar of fire and white smoke coiled in clouds of moonlight blue and fiery crimson.

Khnum's servants were standing by Dio's side on the roof. All the faces wore the look of that unaccountable joy which people always feel at the sight of a fire at night.

"There, look where it has caught now! The women's apartments are on fire!" someone said.

"No, the prince's lodge," another answered.

"And now something in the garden is on fire, by the very lake, it must be Aton's chapel."

"I expect it's all Kiki's doing—his handiwork!"

"The rabble will warm their hands at the fire, you may be sure!"

"Look, mates, look, its begun on our side, too!" said someone joyfully, pointing to the right side of

the river, where fire broke out in two places at once.

"Ah, the dogs, they've set it ablaze from all sides!"

Khnum came up on to the roof by a steep staircase. Two servants supported him. He had just got out of bed: after the trial of Yubra that afternoon he had had a liver attack. Nibituia and Inioteph, his secretary, followed him.

An armchcair was brought for Khnum and Nibituia sat on a stool at his feet. Dio came up to them and kissed them both on the shoulders.

"Is it long since you came back from town, my daughter?" Khnum asked her.

"I have only just returned."

"Have you heard anything?"

"The rebels have been scattered near Amon's temple, at Oisit, but at other places they are gathering together again, burning and plundering. I've heard that the Achean mercenaries have come with Mahu, the king's chief of the guards."

"Extraordinary!" Inioteph muttered under his breath and shook his head with a smile.

Khnum looked at him sullenly from under his brows.

"What are you muttering?"

"Extraordinary, I say: there are plenty of loyal troops in the town and instead of sending them against the rebels they wait for the Acheans!"

"Hold your tongue, silly! You must be careful what you say. . . . And where is the Viceroy?" he turned to Dio again.

"No one knows for certain. Some say he is on the other side of the river and others that he has

come over to this side, with a large detachment of Nubians."

She very nearly said 'run away' and Khnum understood.

"Uhuh have mercy upon us!" Nibituia sighed. "What if he falls into the brigands' hands!"

Khnum looked at the fire for some time without speaking.

"Quite, quite, quite! Here it is, this is the beginning," he said, quietly, as though thinking aloud. "According to Ipuver's prophecy 'the slaves shall be masters, the beggars shall become new gods.' Our Yubra knew what he was doing, the worm: an ant knows how far the flood will reach and build its hill on safe ground. He has gone to the rebels just in time."

Dio, too, was looking at the fire and suddenly the familiar feeling of repetition, of eternal recurrence came over her — *nem-ankh* — 'all this has been already'; the red flame of the fire lighted from below the bare rocks and was reflected as a red pillar in the water in exactly the same way; white smoke curled in clouds of moonlight-blue and fiery crimson just like this; now as then the cold of the dead lips penetrated her through and through—it never left her from the moment she kissed Pentaur good-bye.

There was a sound of rapid steps on the stairs. The centurion of the Viceroy's bodyguard, quite a young boy, ran up to the roof. From his dusty helmet, torn clothes, restless eyes and trembling lips one could see that he had just come from a serious engagement.

"Rejoice, my lord!" he said, approaching Khnum

with a low bow, "His Highness asks me to tell you . . . ."

He stopped breathless with hurry.

"Is His Highness safe?" Khnum asked, looking into the frightened face of the boy.

"Thanks be to Aton, he is safe now, but he has been in great danger. The riotous rabble is so turbulent, it is terrible. . . . His Highness will be here directly, he asks you to give him shelter."

"How many are coming with him?"

"Less than thirty."

"Where are the others?"

"Some have run away and others have been sent to Mahu, the chief of the guards: His Highness has given him the command of the city."

"Quite, quite, quite," said Khnum, shaking his head, thoughtfully: he understood that Tuta ran away like a coward. "Mahu is a brave soldier and will make short work of the rebels. For the moment the city is saved, though God only knows what the end of it will be. . . . Well, let us go, my son, I shall be happy to receive His Highness."

Khnum got up and went downstairs. All followed him.

Dio and Zenra went into Dio's room on the second storey. Dio began to undress. She was trembling so that her teeth were chattering. The cold still penetrated her through and through.

"Why are you trembling?" Zenra asked her.

Dio made no answer and lay down on the couch. Zenra tucked her in, kissed her and was about to go when Dio took her hand.

"Do you know, nurse, Pentaur is killed?" she said quietly, with apparent calm.

The old woman's legs gave way under her. She sat down on the edge of the couch so as not to fall.

"Good Lord!" she whispered, with the surprise people always feel at the news of a sudden death. "But how, where, when?"

"Just now in the riot by Amon's temple."

"Ah, poor thing!" Zenra wept. 'Such a good man, and I had hoped . . ."

Dio smiled.

"You hoped he would marry me? Yes, the bridegroom was right enough, but the bride was no good . . . . Well, go now and don't cry. One mustn't cry for him—he died a good death. God grant us all to die like that!"

Dio closed her eyes, but as soon as Zenra went out she opened them again and looked at the other end of the room where a moonbeam fell upon the tall Amon's harp with crossed strings and two rainbow-coloured sun discs at the foot; their golden centres glittered dimly in the uncertain light. It was the harp on which Pentaur had played that afternoon his quiet songs of love and death.

Whether a cloud had covered the moon or Dio's eyes were dimmed with tears, she suddenly fancied that somebody's shadow flitted across the slanting square made by the moonbeams on the white wall. "It is he," she thought, and was all alert as though waiting for the harpstrings to sound. But all was silent and the shadow disappeared; the light on the wall was once more even and white. Dio covered her

head with the bedclothes and settled down to sleep but she could not.

All of a sudden she heard the sound of the harp. She threw off the coverlet, sat up and listened: the chords were ringing and singing:

"Death is now to me like sweetest myrrh,
Death is now to me like healing,
Death is now to me like refreshing rain,
Death is now to me like a home to an exile!"

And again a shadow flitted across the wall. Terror possessed her. But the familiar pain of inexpiable guilt, insatiable pity was stronger than terror: oh, if she could only see his shadow, could only say to his shadow 'forgive'!

She got up from the bed and went to the harp. The strings continued vibrating quietly but clearly. Something living was fluttering down below. Dio looked down and saw a bat that was caught in the network of the crossed strings and was struggling against them.

Dio smiled bitterly and regretted the terror of the moment ago. The wall of death rose between them more impenetrable than ever, the dead went further away into death, as though he had died again.

She carefully released the captive, kissed it on the head and, climbing on to a chair, let it out of the long and narrow window right up by the ceiling.

She returned to her bed, lay down and sank at once into the deep heavy sleep of grief.

"Get up, my dear, get up, it is time to go," she heard Zenra's voice over her.

"To go? Where?" she muttered without opening her eyes.

"To the City of the Sun. Tuta is going to-day and we go with him. Come, wake up, sleepy head!"

Dio opened her eyes. The light was still dim in the windows: the sun had not yet risen. But a sudden joy flooded her like sunlight. It seemed she had only now understood what it meant—"Akhnaton, the Joy of the Sun!"

She dressed quickly and ran up to the roof.

The winter morning was still and misty and its stillness seemed to say that the riot was over, the earth had not turned upside down, but stood firmly and would go on doing so for a long time yet. Everything was as usual: two white turtle-doves were cooing in the garden under the black feathery cedar tree; the morning sounds, slightly muffled by the fog, were wafted from afar over the water of the canal: the braying of the donkey, the creaking of the water-raising wheels, the clatter of the laundry bats and the mournful droning song:

> "Washerman, washing clothes in the river,
> Good neighbour of the crocodile swimming past."

As always one smelt in the morning freshness the slightly bitter smoke of manure-bricks, like the smell of autumn bonfires in the fields of her native north.

Suddenly a warm, rosy light shone through the cold whiteness of the mist, like heavenly joy through earthly sorrow. "Heaven is united with the earth; on earth there is the joy of heaven." Dio recalled the words of the Osiris mysteries.

"Joy of the Sun, Joy of the Sun—Akhnaton!" she repeated, weeping and laughing with joy.

Zenra called to her and told her to make haste. Dio ran downstairs to say good-bye to Khnum and Nibituia. Khnum gave her his blessing and kind old Nibituia put her arms around her and wept: she had grown to love Dio as her own daughter.

They stepped into a boat and went down the Big Canal to the Risit Harbour where the Viceroy's boat was waiting. Tuta was on it already: he had gone before daylight.

The boat had two masts; the sails with a check pattern were spread out widely like a falcon's wings; on the prow was the horned head of a gazelle and on the stern a huge lotus-flower: the rudder was a flowering shrub and its handle the head of a king in a high tiara; the deck cabins of carved acacia wood were aranged in two storeys, like a small palace, magnificently painted and gilded, and fenced round the top with a network of royal snakes standing on their tails; coloured flags were displayed everywhere. The whole ship was a living miracle of gold, purple and azure, half bird, half flower.

The anchor was raised and they set off. The sun had risen and the mists melted away. A fresh wind blowing through the mountain gorges, filled the sails; the oarsmen plied their oars and the ship swiftly glided down the river.

Tuta did not leave his cabin all day: he had tooth-ache and his cheek was swollen. The cat Ruru went about with a bandaged paw: it had been hit with a stone in the riot. When at last Tuta did come out towards evening he looked so crestfallen that Dio thought he was just like a cat that had receeived a shower bath.

Later on the wits at court composed a song about this dismal journey.

Poor little Tuta
Moans in his cabin.
His cheek is swollen,
Toothache very bad.

He warmed himself that night
By the Charuk palace fire,
Then exposed his heated cheek
To a draught in terror dire.

"Well, he hasn't had his way this time, but he will the next," Dio thought. "You will be king over the mice, you cat."

The City of the Sun, Akhetaton, Egypt's new capital, was built in the province of Hares, half-way between Memphis and Thebes, four hundred *aters* or five days' journey from Thebes.

They sailed in the day-time only and spent the nights in harbours: sailing at night was dangerous because of the many shallows and whirlpools. The bed of the Nile changed continually, especially in winter when the water was shallow. The pilot, standing on the ship's prow, was all the time feeling the bottom with a pole.

They passed the big commercial harbour, Copt, which lay on the caravan route leading through the desert to the Red Sea; the town of Dendera, with the great temple of Isis-Hathor; the town of Abt, where the body of the god-man, Osiris, was buried, and the most ancient of the Egyptian cities, Tinis, the capital of Men, the first king of Egypt.

But the cities were few; poor villages with huts made of the dried mud of the Nile were more frequent. The yellow streak of dead sand and the black streak of fertile earth—Black Earth, *Kemet,* was the name of Egypt—stretched on either side of the river, peaceful, simple and monotonous; the black of the Nile mud, humid and shining like the living 'pupil of Isis' and the yellow of the desert—life and death—were side by side, in an eternal union, eternal peace.

It was winter—sowing time. Men were ploughing, harrowing, sowing. Oxen slowly walked along drawing rich furrows with the plough. Here and there the first crops already showed their bright spring green. And the melancholy singing of the ploughman echoed far in the stillness of the fields.

The dull white waters of the Nile now flowed fast, pressed in by rocky banks; now widened out in pools and backwaters still as a pond, with impassable jungles of papyrus and green carpets of floating lotus leaves; only a hippopotamus, waddling ashore, and a lion or a leopard, coming down to drink, cut narrow paths in those thickets.

A long-legged ibis strode along the humid slime measuring the ground like the wise god Tot, the land-measurer. Crocodiles lay on the sandbanks, like slimy logs, and the birds *benu*—a kind of heron—walked along their backs picking off the water fleas or, fearlessly thrusting their heads into the open jaws, cleaned the monsters' teeth.

And long after the fall of dusk, the tops of the cliffs glowed a fiery yellow and the girlishly slender outlines of the palms and the coal black cones of the

granaries showed black against the crimson west.

The nights were as still as the days; only the jackals barked and howled in the desert and the hippopotamus in the papyrus thicket bellowed, like a bull, at the dazzlingly bright moon, the sun of the night.

And in the morning the day-sun rose as radiant as ever. The two streaks—the black and the yellow—stretched along the banks as monotonously as before; the oxen walked along as slowly, cutting deep furrows with the plough and the melancholy singing of the ploughman echoed in the stillness of the fields.

And everything was as still and gentle as the face of the god whose name is Quiet-Heart.

On the evening of the fifth day after passing a rocky gorge that seemed like a dark and narrow fortress gate, the ship suddenly came out into a sunlit expanse of water. One gate was in the south and another in the north; between them, surrounded on all sides by mountain ridges, as by fortress walls, lay the great plain cut in two by the Nile: in the west green meadows stretched as far as the Lybian Hills that melted into rose and amethyst in the light of the setting sun; in the east lay the semicircle of rocky and sandy desert, rising gradually towards the parched rocks of the Arabian mountains. Between the river and the desert there was a long and narrow streak of palm groves and gardens. White houses were scattered among them like dice and a huge white temple towered above them.

"The City of the Sun! The City of the Sun!" Dio recognised it at once and with a joyous terror she thought: "*He* is here!"

And just as when she stood by the body of Pentaur, the word 'He' had a double meaning for her: he—the king and He—the Son.

PART II

WHO IS HE?

I

,Akhnaton Uaenra, the Joy of the Sun, the only Son of the Sun, speak thus: here will I build a city in the name of Aton, my Father, for it was none other than He brought me to Akhetaton, his portion from all eternity. There was not any man in the whole land who led me to it, saying 'build a city here,' but my heavenly Father has said it. This land belongs not to a god nor to a goddess, not to a prince nor to a princess, but only to Aton, my Father. May the City of God thrive like the sun in heaven. Behold, I raise my hand and swear: I will not pass beyond the boundary of this domain, which Aton has himself desired and fenced in with his hills, and with which He is pleased for ever and ever!"

This inscription was cut in the thickness of the rocks, north, south, east and west of the city of Akhetaton, on fourteen flat boundary stones, which marked the portion of Aton, the kingdom of God upon earth. They were fourteen according to the fourteen parts of the dismembered body of Osiris, the Great Victim, for King Akhnaton was himself the second Osiris.

In the fourth year of his reign he had abandoned

the ancient capital of Egypt, Nut Amon or Thebes, and founded a new one.

The city was built with such haste that the newly erected walls were showing cracks; the cracks were patched up with clay and the building carried on. Experienced architects merely shook their heads, remembering the old saying: 'to build in a hurry means no end of worry.'

The king's exchequer was growing empty; innumerable stores of treasure, plundered from the temples of Amon, were being spent; tens of thousands of workmen were driven to Akhetaton from all parts of Egypt; they worked even at night, by torchlight. And the miracle had taken place; within ten years a new city had grown up in the desert; so does the pink lotos, nekheb, break into flower during the night and appear above the water in the morning; so does a beautiful mirage rise over the shimmering heat of the desert; but the water flows away and the lotos fades; the wind blows and the mirage is gone.

Dio came to Akhetaton five days before the great festival, the twelfth anniversary of the city's foundation, coinciding with the day of Aton's nativity, the winter solstice, when the 'little sun,' the baby god Osiris-Sokkaris, rises from the dead and is born. She was to dance before the king for the first time at that festival.

Tuta had intended to present her at court as soon as they arrived, but she did not wish it and he gave way; he gave way to her in everything, waiting upon

her wishes; it was evident that she was for him a big stake in a big game; he was bargaining over 'the Pearl of the Seas' like a clever merchant.

He was soon comforted for his bad luck in Thebes. While still on the journey he received good news from his friends at court who had done their best for him and gave the king such a version of the rising that Tuta's weakness appeared as mercy, his cowardice as love of peace: he ran away from the battlefield, they said, because he remembered that 'peace was better than war.'

Dio spent the five days before the festival in Tuta's house near the temple of Aton, preparing for the dance. She did not go out nor show herself to anyone in the daytime, but at night she went up to the flat roof of the temple where she was to dance. She practiced there herself and taught others.

The day before the feast she was sitting alone, late in the evening, in the newly decorated room of Tuta's summer house; he and his wife, the king's daughter Ankhsenbatona, or Ankhi, lived in the winter house. The smell of fresh paint and plaster came from the still unfinished part of the house, where in the daytime masons, carpenters and painters were at work. It seemed to Dio that the whole town was pervaded by this smell.

Red pillars with green garlands of palm leaves supported the sky-blue ceiling. The white walls were decorated with a delicate design of yellow butterflies, fluttering over fine seaweed.

The freshness of a winter evening came through the long, narrow stone-trellised windows, right up by the ceiling. Sitting on a low couch—a brick plat-

form covered with rugs and cushions — Dio, wrapped up in her Cretan wolf-fur, was warming herself by the hearth—an earthenware platter of hot embers.

"To-morrow I shall see *him,*" she thought with fear. She had begun to be afraid on the very first day she arrived, and grew more so as time went on; and on this last night before the meeting such fear possessed her that she felt she might run away if she did not control herself. She went hot and cold at the thought that the next day she was to dance before the king. "My legs will give way under me, I shall stumble, fall flat, disgrace poor Tuta!" she laughed, as though to make her fear worse.

In the depth of the room two sanctuary lamps were hanging in two niches decorated with alabaster bas-reliefs of the king on the left and the queen on the right. The wall space between them was covered with rows of turquoise blue hieroglyphics on golden yellow ground, glorifying the god Aton.

Dio got up, and going to the niche on the left, looked at the bas-relief of the king standing at an altar. He was raising two round sacrificial loaves, one on each palm, towards the Sun. The enormously tall royal tiara, tapering to a point, seemed too heavy for the childish head on the slender neck, flexible like the stem of a flower. The childish face was irregular, with a receding forehead and a protruding mouth. The charm of his naked body was like that of a flower that had just opened and was already fading with the heat:

"Thou art the flower uprooted from the ground,
Thou art the plant unmoistened by running water."

Dio recalled the song of weeping for the dead god Tammuz.

The neck, the shoulders, the hands, the calves and the ankles were slender and narrow like those of a boy of ten, but the hips were wide like a woman's and the breasts too full: neither he nor she—he and she at the same time—a marvel of god-like beauty.

On Mount Dicte in the Island of Crete, Dio had heard an ancient legend: in the beginning man and woman were one body with two faces; but the Lord cut their body in two and gave to each a spinal cord; 'that's how people cut eggs in two with a hair for pickling,' old Mother Akakalla, the prophetess, used to add with a queer, uncanny laugh when she told this legend in Dio's ear.

"The hair could not have passed right through his body," she thought, looking at the King's image, and she recalled the prophecy: "the kingdom of God shall come when the two shall be one, and male shall be female and there shall be neither male nor female."

She knelt down and stretched out her arms to the marvel of godlike charm.

"My brother, my sister, the two horned moon, the double-edged axe, my lover, my loved one!" she whispered devoutly.

A whiff of wind came from the window; the flame of the lamp flickered, the outline of the figure grew dim and through the marvel the monster peered—neither old nor young, neither man nor woman, a eunuch, a decrepit babe, the horror of Gem-Aton.

"Go to him then, the seducer, the son of perdition,

the devil," the voice of Ptamose sounded over her and she buried her face in her hands, terrified.

At the same moment she felt that someone was standing behind her; she turned round and saw a little girl.

A robe, transparent like running water, fell in flowing folds over the slender body. The overdress had come open in front and the amber-brown skin could be seen through the shift worn underneath. The girl wore on her head a huge shiny black wig of tightly plaited tresses cut evenly round the edge. A tiny talc cup, turned upside down and filled with the *kemi* ointment made up of seven perfumes—the royal ointment—was fixed on the top of the head. Slowly melting with the warmth of the body it dropped like fragrant dew on the hair, face and clothes. The long stem of a pink lotos was thrust through a hole in the cup in such a way that the half-open flower, with a sweet smell of anise, hung over the forehead.

The girl was about twelve years old. The childish face was charming though irregular, with a protruding mouth and a receding forehead; the large slightly squinting eyes had a fixed heavy look such as one sees in the eyes of an epileptic.

At one moment she seemed a child, at another a woman; there was something pathetic and charming in this elusive twilight between childhood and womanhood. She was a half-open bud like the rosy lotos *nekheb* over her forehead, fragrant with the freshness of water; it closes its petals and shortens its stem at night as it hides under the water and when, in the morning, it comes up again and opens

its chalice, a golden winged beetle flies out of it—Horus, the newly-born god of the Sun.

The little girl appeared so suddenly, so like a phantom that Dio looked at her almost in fear. Both were silent for a second.

"Dio?" the visitor asked at last.

Yes. And who are you?"

She made no answer; but raising her left eyebrow and shrugging her shoulders, asked again:

"What were you doing here? Praying?"

"No . . . . simply looking at the figure . . . ."

"But why were you kneeling, then?"

Dio blushed in confusion. The child lifted her eyebrow again and shrugged her shoulders.

"You don't want to tell me? Very well, don't."

She went up to the couch and picked up from it the gazelle skin which she had taken off when she came into the room.

"It is cold and damp in your room. You don't know how to keep a fire in," she said, wrapping herself up. "Well, aren't you going to say anything? I want to talk to you."

She sat on the couch in the Egyptian fashion, clasping her knees with her hands and resting her chin on them. Dio sat down beside her.

"You don't know yet who I am?" asked the child, fixing her heavy gaze upon Dio.

"I don't.."

"His wife."

"Whose wife?"

"Are you pretending, or what?"

"The princess?" Dio guessed suddenly.

"Thank heaven, at last!" said the visitor. "Well, why do you sit and stare at me?"

"Why, what's wrong?"

"What's wrong? The king's daughter, a child of the Sun, is before you and it doesn't occur to you to make the slightest bow?"

Dio smiled and knelt before her on the couch, as a grown up person kneels before a child to caress it.

"Rejoice, Princess Ankhsenbatona, my dear, welcome guest!" she said with all her heart and was about to kiss the princess's hand, when the girl quickly drew it away.

"There, now she is grabbing my hand! Is that the way to bow to royalty?"

"Isn't it?"

"You should bow down to the ground! Well, I don't care, I don't want your bows, sit down . . . . Wait a minute though!"

She also knelt suddenly in front of Dio.

"Turn to the light, please; that's it!"

Dio turned her face to the lamp that stood on the floor by the couch—a flower of blue glass on a high alabaster stand. Ankhi approached her face to Dio's and with a business-like frown began to scrutinize her in silence.

"Yes, very beautiful," she whispered at last as though speaking to herself. "What rouge do you use?"

"I don't use any."

"What next?"

She licked her little finger and raising it to Dio's face asked:

"May I try?"

"Do."

Ankhi slowly moved her finger along Dio's cheek and looked to see if the tip of it was red. No, it was not red.

"Strange!" she said in surprise. "How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"How is it you are so young?"

"But twenty isn't old, is it?"

"Oh yes, it is with us. We are married at ten and grandmothers at thirty. But, of course, with you in the north everything is different: the sun makes people old and the cold keeps them young," she said complacently, evidently repeating somebody else's words.

She sat down in the same attitude as before, clasping her knees with her hands, and sank into thought.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked, again fixing her heavy gaze on Dio.

"I am not laughing, I am merely happy."

"What about?"

"I don't know. Simply because you have come."

"It's always 'simply' with you. . . . Do you imagine I am a little girl? . . . . What has he said to you about me?"

Dio understood that 'he' was Tuta.

"He said you were very clever and a beauty and that he loved you more than anything in the world."

"Nonsense! You just say this out of kindness. . . . You must have both been laughing at me. Has he told you that I play dolls?"

"No, he hasn't."

"But I do play! I played last summer and will play again if I want to. I don't care if they do laugh at me. The king says children are better than grown-ups, wiser, they know more. Eternity, he says, is a child playing with, playing . . ."

She forgot what Eternity was playing with and flushed crimson.

"Ah, curse the thing! The wool has again made my head hot." She pulled the wig off her head and flung it away. The talc cup clinked against the wall; the lotos stem broke and the flower hung down piteously.

"Do you imagine that I have dressed up for you? Not likely! I am going to supper at the palace . . ."

Her head was shaven and had such a long, vegetable, marrow-like skull that Dio almost cried out with surprise. In Egypt long heads were regarded as particularly beautiful in girls. The strange custom of bandaging newborn children's heads in order to lengthen their skulls was brought to Egypt from the Kingdom of Mitanni, the midnight land by the upper Euphrates, whence Akhnaton's mother, Queen Tiy, came. All the King's daughters were long-headed. Noble ladies and, later on, men suddenly developed long skulls also: they wore special skull caps—"royal marrows"—made of the finest antelope skins.

Very likely Princess Ankhi took off her wig on purpose to boast of the shape of her head to Dio: 'You may have rosy cheeks, but I have a royal marrow!"

"And is it true you are a sorceress, they say?"

"No, it isn't."

"Then what did they want to burn you for?"

Dio said nothing.

"Again, you don't want to tell me?"

"I don't."

"You killed the god Bull, your Mreura, or was it Hapius?"

Hapius was the bull of Memphis and Mreura the bull of Heliopolis, the incarnate god of the Sun. "We, too, had a Mreura," Ankhi went on, not waiting for an answer. "It died two years ago: I was very fond of it. It was old and blind. I used to go into its stable, put my arms round it and kiss its head, and it would lick my face and bellow into my ear as though to say something. To kill a creature like that, good heavens! It's like killing a baby. . . ."

She paused, and looking at Dio from under her brows said suddenly:

"They have found a wax doll in the palace."

"What wax doll?"

"A charmed one, with its heart pierced by a needle; the person whose name is written on the wax is sure to die. The king's name was written on it; they found it in the king's bedchamber. . . ."

She paused again and asked:

"How long have you been here?"

"Five days."

"And the wax doll was found the day before yesterday."

"Well, what of it?"

"Nothing. One can't stop people talking and they say all sorts of things . . . . And why do you sit at home hiding from everyone and only come out at night?"

Her face worked suddenly, the eyes flashed angrily, the lips trembled and she said, looking straight at Dio:

"Are you his concubine?"

"Whose?"

"Tuta's."

Dio clasped her hands in dismay.

"What nonsense, princess darling!"

"Why nonsense?"

"Because I cannot be anybody's concubine: priestesses of the Mother are perpetual virgins. And, besides it's a matter of taste. His Highness . . . may I speak the truth, you won't be angry?"

"No, speak."

"His Highness is very nice, but I don't like him at all."

Ankhi looked at her, heaved a deep sigh, as a person suddenly relieved of violent pain, and whispered:

"Is it true?"

"Why, look into my eyes, don't you see it is true?"

Ankhi looked straight into her eyes; then turned away and buried her face in her hands; her thin shoulders quivered and all her body trembled with silent sobs.

Dio moved up to her and putting her arms round her pressed the girl's long shaven head—the royal marrow—to her bosom.

"Don't you believe me?"

"Yes, I do. I have known all along that it was all untrue about your being a sorceress, and the wax doll. I said it all on purpose . . ."

'Then why are you crying?"

"Oh, because I am so mean, so horrid! I liked you the moment I saw you and so I got angry. I am always angry with the people I am fond of . . . . But you don't know all yet! I made old Iagu promise—he is an old servant, a faithful dog and loves me as his own soul—I made him promise that he would kill you if you really were Tuta's mistress. I would have killed him and myself, too—that's what I am like! When the devil gets hold of me I can do anything. . . ."

She wept again.

"There, there, my little darling, my sweet little girl!" Dio whispered, stroking her head, and suddenly she remembered she had said almost the same words when she caressed Eoia just like that. "That's all over now and done with! Let us be friends, shall we?"

Ankhi said nothing but pressed more closely to her. Dio kissed her on the lips without speaking and herself wept for joy.

Joy rose in her heart, like the sun, and the fear she had felt melted away like a shadow.

"Darling, darling child!" she thought, "it is he himself, Akhnaton, the Joy of the Sun, has sent you to me as joy's messenger!"

II

IN the silence of the night a trumpet proclaimed joy unto men. First one, then another, a third—and then scores and hundreds of trumpets played the hymn to Aton:

Glorious is Thy rising in the East,
Lord and giver of life, Aton!
Thou sendest Thy rays and darkness flees,
All the earth is filled with joy.

The trumpets sounded at every end of the city, arousing many-voiced echoes in the mountains. Just as cocks call to one another and crow to the Sun in the night, so did the trumpets call at the hour before dawn when men's sleep is like the sleep of death, as is said in Aton's hymn:

Men sleep in darkness like the dead,
Their heads are wrapped up and their nostrils stopped.
Stolen are the things that are under their heads,
While they know it not.
Every lion cometh forth from his den,
Serpents creep from out of their holes,
The Creator has gone to rest and the world is mute.

But the trumpet was waking the sleepers as the call of the Lord will one day wake the dead. Old men and children, slaves and free, rich and poor, foreigners and Egyptians, were all running to greet the newborn sun, the god Aton.

Dio was roused by the sound of the trumpet in the small chapel of Aton's temple where she slept that night with the girl singers, musicians and dancers who were to accompany her in her dance before the king.

"The trumpets call, the trumpets! Get up, girls! The sun is born, rejoice!" she heard the voices round her.

They embraced and kissed one another, wishing each other new joy with the new sun.

They ran out on to the flat roof of the temple.

It was a warm night: after midnight the wind had changed to the south and the temperature rose at once. Big round white clouds were floating across the sky like sails. Misty, fluffy stars twinkled like wind-blown flames and a waning copper-yellow moon lay on its back over the black ridge of the Lybian mountains.

Heaven, earth, water, plants, animals—all were still asleep; men alone were awake. The town down below was stirring like an ant-heap. Lights were appearing in the windows, lamps were smoking on the roofs, torches glowed in the streets filled with dark crowds that streamed along like rivers. There was a hum of voices, rustle of feet, stamping of hoofs, clatter of wheels, neighing of horses, cries of soldiers and the ceaseless call of the trumpets—the hymn to Aton:

> Glorious is Thy rising in the East,
> Lord and giver of life, Aton!
> Thou sendest Thy rays and darkness flees,
> All the earth is filled with joy.

"There goes the royal procession! Let us run

downstairs, girls, we can see better from there!" cried one of those who were looking from the roof of Aton's temple, and they all flew downstairs like a flock of turtle-doves, on to the flat top of the gates nearest the street where the procession was passing.

"The king! The king! Down! Down! Down!" cried the runners, scattering the crowd with their staves as they marched along in step, their bare backs bent double.

The king's bodyguard, the Hittite Amazons, came next. Yellow skinned and flat chested, with narrow eyes and high cheek bones, one warrior lock on their shaven heads, they carried bronze double-edged axes, the sacred weapon of the Virgin-Mother.

Then came courtiers, judges, councillors, war-lords, treasurers, clerks, priests, soothsayers, scribes, chiefs of the bakers, chiefs of the butlers, chiefs of the king's stables, lords of the bedchamber, masters of the robes, hairdressers, launderers, perfumers and so on: all were dressed in white robes with pointed, stiffly starched aprons; all wore the special skull-caps that made their shaven heads look like the egg-shaped 'royal marrows.'

Then came the censer-bearers, lavishly burning incense, its white clouds turning rosy in the torch-light; these were followed by the fan-bearers waving multi-coloured fans of ostrich feathers and real flowers, fixed on long poles.

Finally there came twenty-four black Ethiopian youths, naked but for short aprons of parrot feathers and wearing golden nose rings; they carried on their shoulders a tall ivory throne covered with leaf gold with lions for a pedestal.

Dio clearly saw the leopard skin on the narrow boyish shoulders, the simple long white robe of such transparent linen that one could see through it above the elbows of the thin dark-skinned boyish arms, the coloured hieroglyphics of Aton's name; she saw the staff—symbol of godhead—in one hand and the scourge in the other; the pear-shaped royal tiara, made of pale *cham,* a mixture of gold and silver, studded with small stars of lapis lazuli, and the golden snake of the sun, Uta, coiled on the forehead.

She saw all this but she did not dare to look at his face. "I will look when I am dancing before him," she thought, as she ran upstairs to the roof of Aton's temple.

"Down! Down! The king comes! the god comes!" the runners shouted, and people bowed to the ground.

The procession entered the gates of Aton's temple.

The temple of the Sun, the House of Joy, consisted of seven pillared courts, with tower-like pylon gates, side-chapels and three hundred and sixty-five altars. Seven courts were the seven temples of the seven peoples, for as it says in the hymn to Aton:

> Thou hast carried them all away captive,
> Thou bindest them by Thy love.

"There was a time when by 'people'—*romet*—the Egyptians meant themselves only; all other nations were excluded; but now all were brothers, children of one Heavenly Father, Aton. The Temple of the Sun was the temple for all mankind.

Seven courts, seven temples: the first was dedicated to Tammuz of Babylon, the second to Attis of the Hittites, the third to Adon of Canaan, the fourth to Adun of Crete, the fifth to Mithra of Mitanni, the sixth to Ashmun of Phoenicia, the seventh to Zagreus-Bacchus of Thrace. All these god-men who had suffered, died and risen from the dead, were but shadows of the one sun that was to rise—the Son.

The seven open temples led into the eighth, the secret one, which no one but the king and the high priest dared enter. There in perpetual twilight stood sixteen giant Osirises made of alabaster, pale as phantoms, tightly bound with winding sheets, wearing gods' tiaras and holding a staff—symbol of godhead—in one hand and a scourge in the other; the faces of all were in the likeness of King Akhnaton.

Passing through the seven open temples the procession approached the eighth, the secret one. The king went into it alone, and, while he was praying there, all waited outside. When he came out, they mounted by an outside staircase on to the flat roof of the upper temple, which was built on the roof of the lower.

The great altar of the Sun stood here; it was made of huge blocks of cream-coloured sandstone, pale as a girl's body and shaped like a pyramid with its top cut off; two gradual approaches, without steps, led up to it. On a high platform at the top of the pyramid a sanctuary fire was perpetually burning, and, above it on a column of alabaster, the sun disc of Aton, made of pale *cham*—a mixture of gold and silver—glistened with a dull brilliance. It was

the highest point of the huge edifice and the first and last ray of the sun was always reflected upon it.

The king, the queen, the princesses and the heir apparent—only those in whose veins flowed the blood of the Sun—went up to the top of the pyramid, and then the king alone ascended the platform where the fire was burning.

People thronged in the seven courts of the temple down below, on the pylons, the staircases, the roofs of both temples; it was like a living mountain of people and the highest point of it was one man—the king.

"I come to glorify Thy rays, living Aton, one eternal God!" he said stretching out his arms to the Sun.

"Praise be to Thee, living Aton, who hast made the heavens and the mysteries thereof," answered the high priest Merira, who stood at the base of the pyramid. "Thou art in heaven and Thy beloved son Akhnaton is on earth!"

"I show the way of life to all of you, generations that have been and are to come," the king continued. "Give praise to the God Aton, the living God, and ye shall live! Gather together and come, all ye people of salvation; turn to the Lord, all ye ends of the earth, for Aton is God and there is none other God but He."

"The God Aton is the only God and there is none other God but He," answered the innumerable crowds down below, and the call of thousands was like the roar of the sea.

The moon had set, the stars were hardly visible. The wind dropped, the clouds cleared away, the sky

was almost grey. And suddenly a giant ray, shaped like a pyramid with its base on the ground and its top in the zenith, appeared in the morning twilight and white opalescent lights, like sheet lightning, flickered across it—the Light of the Zodiac, the forerunner of the Sun.

The king, with his wife, daughters and the heir apparent, descended from the pyramid altar and went into a painted and gilded tent that stood at the eastern side of it.

There was a sound of flutes and a ringing of citherns, then came subdued singing and a slow procession of priestesses, carrying a coffin on their shoulders, mounted the flat roof of the temple by an outer staircase. A dead body wrapped up in a white winding sheet lay in the coffin. The priestesses placed the coffin on the dark purple carpet before the king's tent.

Two mourners came forward, one stood at the head and the other at the feet of the corpse, weeping and calling to each other like the two sister goddesses Isis and Neftis at the tomb of Osiris, their brother. Meanwhile the others, naked but for a narrow black belt below the navel and a black 'bandage of shame' between the legs, were dancing the wild, ancient, magical dance of Osiris-Bata, the rising god, the vegetating ear of corn: standing in a row on one leg they raised the other leg all at once, lowered it and then raised it again, higher and higher each time, so that at last the toes went up higher than the heads.

"Arise, arise, arise! O Sun of all suns, O first fruits of them that slept, arise!" they repeated, also

all at once, to the ringing of the citherns and the squealing of flutes. This meant: "grow up as high as our legs are thrown up, o ear of corn, arise, thou dead one!"

And the mourners wept:

"Come to thy sister, come, my Beloved,
Thou whose heart now beats no more!
I am thy sister who loved thee on earth,
No one has loved thee more than I!"

Suddenly a quiver passed over the corpse, as over a chrysalis when a butterfly stirs within it—a tremor that was like the tremulous lightnings in the sky, as though the same miracle were happening in the human body and in the heavens.

The grave clothes wrapped round the corpse were slowly unwound; the hand was slowly raised to the face as that of one waking from profound slumber; the knees bent slowly; the elbows rested against the bottom of the coffin and the body began to rise.

"Arise! Arise! Arise!" the dancers repeated as an incantation, throwing up their legs higher than their heads in the magical dance.

The light of the Zodiac was no longer visible in the rosy light of the dawn. A glowing ember blazed up in the misty crevice of the Arabian mountains and the first ray of the sun glistened on Aton's disc.

At the same moment the corpse rose, opened its eyes and smiled—and in that smile there was eternal life, the sun that has no setting.

"Dio, the dancer, the Pearl of the Kingdom of the Seas," a whisper was heard in the crowd of the courtiers.

The priestesses finished their magical dance and fell, face downwards, on the ground. The citherns and flutes were silent except one which was still weeping; it was like a lonely bird crying in the twilight:

"On my bed in the night
I looked for him,
For him whom my soul loveth,
I sought him and did not find him."

Stepping out of the coffin, Dio moved towards the sun. She began the dance slowly and quietly, as though in her sleep; there was still something of the stiffness of death in her limbs. But as the sun rose higher the dance grew quicker and more impetuous. Her head was thrown back, her arms were stretched towards the sun; the white veils fell on the purple carpet, revealing the innocent body, neither masculine nor feminine—at once masculine and feminine—a marvel of godlike beauty. The sun was kissing her and she was surrendering herself to it, the mortal uniting with the god as a bride with her lover.

"Put me as a seal upon thine heart,
As a ring upon thine hand
For strong as death is love,"

sobbed the flute.

The song stopped suddenly; the dancer fell flat on her back as though dead. One of the priestesses ran up to her and covered her with the white grave clothes.

The soft sound of footsteps and a voice that seemed familiar, though she had never heard it,

reached Dio's ears. She raised her head and saw the king face to face. He was saying something to her but she could not make it out. She looked into his face eagerly as though recognising him after a long, long parting: this was perhaps how lovers recognised each other in the world beyond the grave.

She recalled her fear of him and was surprised not to be feeling any. A simple, quite a simple, face like anybody else's; the face of the son of man, the brother of man, gentle, very gentle like the face of the god whose name is Quiet Heart.

"Are you very tired?" he was asking, probably not for the first time.

"No, not very."

"How well you danced! Our dancers can't do it. Is this your Cretan dance?"

"Both ours and yours together."

He, too, was gazing at her as though trying to recognise her.

"Where have I seen you?"

"Nowhere, sire."

"Strange, I keep fancying I have seen you before. . . ."

She was sitting at his feet and he stood bending over her. Both were uncomfortable. The white sheet kept slipping off her naked body and she was trying unsuccessfully to keep it on. She suddenly felt confused and blushed.

"Are you cold? Go along and get dressed," he said and blushed, too. 'Just like a little boy,' she thought, and recalled the figure at the Charuk palace —the boy who looked like a girl.

He took a ring off his finger, put it on hers, and,

bending down still lower, kissed her on the head. Then he left her and returned to the royal tent.

"The fish has bitten!" an old dignitary, Ay, Tuta's friend and patron, who stood next to him in the crowd of courtiers, whispered in his ear.

"You think so?" Tuta asked joyfully.

"Set your mind at rest: it has bitten. You couldn't find another such pair: they have been made for each other. Man and woman—a hook and an eye—are two in love, but here there are four."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, there are two in him, two in her; an eye—a hook, a hook—an eye; once they catch there will be no disentangling them."

"You are a wise man, Ay!" Tuta said in delight.

III

CHOIR of blind singers began the hymn to Aton.

They had been tramps and beggars walking along the high roads from village to village. One day the king heard them at the gates of Aton's temple and liked their singing so much that he made them temple choristers — that God might receive praise not only from the happy, the wise and the seeing, but also from the blind, wretched and ignorant.

There were seven of them. They sat on their heels in a row before the king's tent, dressed only in short white aprons, their limbs thin as sticks, their bodies, with distended stomachs and the ribs showing through the skin, blackened by the sun, their heads shaven, their faces wrinkled; the folds of the skin near the mouth resembled those of an old sick dog; they were snub-nosed and, like dogs, seemed to be always sniffing; there were narrow, inflamed slits where their eyes should have been.

The leader of the choir sat in front playing a high seven-stringed harp, while the others, clapping their hands in time, sang in nasal voices but with remarkable intensity of feeling. They looked straight at the sun with their blind eyes but, not seeing the

god of light, Ra, they glorified the god of warmth, Shu:

"Shu our Father, Shu our Mother!
Weeping we have lost our sight.
We praise the sun out of the night.
Have mercy on us, poor blind men!"

And when they finished the melancholy song they began a joyous one:

Glorious is thy rising in the East,
Lord and giver of life, Aton
Thou sendest thy rays and darkness flees,
And the earth is filled with joy.

The roof of the temple was flooded with sunshine, but the seven courts below were still in the shadow and only the high tops of the pylons were gilded by the sun; the bright-coloured pennants on the masts above them fluttered gaily in the morning breeze, white doves flapped their wings joyfully and winter swallows, in their whistling flight, cleft the air singing to the sun, shouting and shrilly calling with joy: 'Ra!'

The king mounted the pyramidal altar once more and threw a handful of incense into the fire. The flame blazed up, turning pale in the sun, clouds of rosy-white smoke rose in the air and immediately similar clouds rose from the three hundred and sixty-five altars in the seven courts below: anyone seeing it from a distance would have thought the city was on fire.

Slowly raising his arms to the sky, as though offering an invisible sacrifice, the king proclaimed:

"All there is between the eastern hills and the western hills—fields, waters, villages, plants, ani-

mals, men—all is brought as sacrifice to thee, Aton, the living Sun, so that thy kingdom may be on earth as it is in heaven, O Father!"

The black harvest of human heads bent down like the harvest corn in the wind. Trumpets, flutes, citherns, harps, lyres, timbrels, cymbals, kinnors combined with the thousands of voices into one deafening chorus.

> "Sing unto the Lord a new song, sing unto the Lord, the earth and all that therein is! Give unto the Lord glory and honour, oh ye tribes of the earth! Let the heavens rejoice and the earth sing in triumph! Rejoice, Joy of the Sun, the only begotten Son of the Sun, Akhnaton Uaenra!"

Gazing into the king's face, Dio thought with as much joy as though she were already seeing the Son Who was to come: "no son of man has been nearer to Him than he!"

Only high officials were admitted into the enclosure round the king's tent. But beyond the enclosure a special place was set apart for the new converts—men of all classes and nationalities — Babylonians, Hittites, Canaanites, Aegians, Lybians, Mitannians, Thracians, Ethiopians and even Jews.

Suddenly Dio saw in that crowd Issachar, the son of Hamuel. He was watching the king intently, his mouth twisted in a malignant smile. Dio could not take her eyes off Issachar's face: she was trying to remember something.

The singing stopped and in the sudden stillness the king's voice was heard:

"Lord, before the world was made, thou hast revealed thy will to thy Son who lives forever. Thou, Father, art in my heart and no one knows thee but me, thy Son."

"Cursed be the deceiver who said 'I am the Son,' " —Dio suddenly recalled Issachar's words in the Gem-ton Chapel and, looking at the king again, she thought with terror: "Who is he? Who is he? Who is he?"

IV

THE children of Israel which came into Egypt were seventy souls; but now the Lord has made us as many as the stars in heaven. And the king of Egypt said unto his people 'behold the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come on, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply and it come to pass that when there falleth out any war they join also unto our enemies.' And so they did set over us taskmasters to afflict us with their burdens and they made our lives bitter with hard bondage in mortar and in brick. And we sighed and groaned by reason of the bondage and our cry had come unto the Lord. And the Lord stretched out his hand and brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And when the King of Egypt and his army overtook us by the Red Sea, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the waters were divided and the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left. And the waters came again upon the Egyptians and covered them; they sank to the bottom as a stone."

This was the story as the Israelites told it, but the Egyptians laughed at them:

"Nothing of the kind has happened: no king of Egypt ever perished in the sea, and the leader of the Jews whom they call in Egyptian *Mosu—Child, Son*—is not a 'Son of God' at all, as they imagine, but the son of a slave, a wicked sorcerer, murderer and thief, who ran away into the desert to the Midian nomads and then secretly returned to Egypt and became the leader of a robber band of Khabiri, the Plunderers, who are the same as the Jews. The Khabiri are continually rising in the border lands of Egypt. In the days of King Tutmose the Fourth there was such a rising; a band of Khabiri went to the desert of Sinai and perished there of hunger and thirst together with *Mosu* or Moses, their leader."

This was how the sons of Ham mocked the sons of Israel. And, indeed, not only the Egyptians but many of the Israelites themselves—for Moses led only a part of them out of Egypt—refused to believe the miracles of Exodus or to worship the new god, Jahve.

"What sort of god is it?" they asked. "We do not know him. Jahve in the Midian language means 'Destroyer.' He is the god of the nomads of Sinai and not of the Israelites, the demon of the desert, a consuming fire. His son, Moses, covered his face when he appeared before the people lest they should discover whom he was like. No, the gods of our fathers, the gentle Elohim, were different: Eliun, the Father, El-Shaddai the Son, and El Ruach, the Mother. This new god is anger, tempest, consuming fire and those three are mercy, loving kindness, dewy freshness."

And they also said:

"There has been no Exodus but there will be; there has been no Son yet but the Son is to come according to the words of our father Jacob: 'the sceptre shall not depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between his feet until the Messiah come.' "

Hamuel, son of Avinoam of the house of Judah, a priest of El-Shaddai, worshipped the old gods, the Elohim, hated the new god Jahve and awaited the coming of the Messiah.

He was a wise man; he doctored the sick; told fortunes by throwing dice—*teraphim*—which revealed the divine preordination of human destinies; he received good pay for this and also made money by a traffic, of which the Customs officers knew nothing, in silphium, a medicinal herb from Lybia, and the balm of Gilead for anointing the dead. He lived in the town of Bubastis at the mouth of the Nile, protected by gods and respected by men.

He had two sons: the elder Eliav by Thamar, an Israelite, and the younger Issachar by Asta, an Egyptian.

It had happened that Hamuel went on business to the town of Mendes; there, in the temple of the god Goat, he saw a little girl priestess, Asta, and fell in love with her so much that he did not hesitate to give a hundred gold rings, *utens,* the price of thirty pairs of oxen, to pay for her flight from the temple: the priestesses betrothed to the god could not under the penalty of death marry anyone and especially not an 'unclean' Jew. Asta loved her mortal

husband ardently, but could not forgive herself for being unfaithful to the immortal one and suffered such remorse that her mind became slightly deranged. When she gave birth to a son she imagined that she had conceived him by the god: the priestesses believed that the god Goat, the fiery-red Bindidi—Sun-Ra in the flesh and the source of virility in men and beasts—had carnal union with them. Asta whispered strange stories to the little Iserker, as she called Issachar in Egyptian, and sang strange songs to him about the golden-fleeced, golden-horned Goat that grazed in the azure meadows of the sky and came down sometimes to love the beautiful daughters of the earth.

Hamuel's first wife, the Israelite, Thamar, bitterly hated the Egyptian and her 'devil's brood, the son of the stinking Goat.' And there really was something goat-like in Issachar's face—in his thick hooked nose, thick lips, slanting yellow eyes and, when he grew up, in the long reddish curls that hung alongside his cheeks, the long parted reddish beard and the raucous, high-pitched, bleating voice.

The schoolboys teased little Iserker and called him "the red goat!" Egyptians considered red-haired people unclean because Set, the devil, was red like the sand of the desert, his kingdom: seeing a red-haired man in the street passers-by spat to avert bad fortune and mothers hid their children from his evil eye. 'It is a bad thing to be red-haired'—the little boy had known this ever since he could remember himself, but he could not decide, even when he had grown up, whether it was a good or a bad thing to be the son of the god Goat. It might be

good for Iserker, the Egyptian, but bad for Issachar, the Israelite; but he never knew whether he was Iserker or Issachar and this was perpetual torture to him.

When, in the early years of the reign of Amenhotep the Fourth, or Akhnaton, as he was to call himself later—news came of the victories of Joshua in the Promised Land, a rebellion broke out among the Israelites left in Egypt. The rebellion started in the town of Bubastis. Hamuel's son Eliav, who was about twenty-five years old, had been seen at the head of the rebels' army. The rebellion was crushed; Eliav ran away and instead of him Issachar, his brother, who was completely innocent, was seized and thrown into prison as a hostage. Asta went from one judge to another giving bribes right and left; they took the bribes but kept the hostage. Then someone informed against Eliav, who had been hiding in the marshy jungles of the Delta; he was seized and Issachar released.

Soon after this Asta died suddenly after drinking some cold beer on a hot day; a few days later two maid-servants in Hamuel's house had a quarrel and one of them told that the other had poisoned their mistress. When both were cross-examined, the accused confessed that she poisoned Asta at the instigation of Thamar. The latter did not deny it and said to her husband straight out:

"I have killed Asta because she informed against Eliav. Kill me, too: blood for blood, life for life."

She spoke in this way because she worshipped the fierce Jahve, the Avenger. But Hamuel, a priest of

the gentle El-Shaddai, had mercy on her and merely ordered her to leave his house for ever. That same night Thamar hanged herself and Hamuel did not survive her long—he died of grief. On his death-bed he admonished Issachar, his son, to await the Messiah.

Left alone in the world, Issachar went to Nut-Amon—Thebes—to his maternal grandfather, the priest Ptahotep, who was the keeper of scrolls in the sanctuary of Amon; there he assumed the rank of a junior priest—*uab*—and became a pupil of Ptamose, the high priest of Amon.

When the apostate king began to persecute the old faith, many of Ptamose's pupils proved false to their teacher either through fear or love of gain; but Issachar remained true to him.

Issachar's perpetual torment was that he could not decide whether he was a Jew or an Egyptian; through revealing to him the mysteries of the divine wisdom, Ptamose solved the question for him: the deeper Issachar studied them, the clearer he saw that the god-man, Osiris, who had been slain, and He of Whom the prophets of Israel had said: "He has poured out His soul unto death and made intercession for the transgressors" were one and the same Messiah.

V

AFTER the mutiny at Thebes, Issachar went to Akhetaton, the City of the Sun, to see his brother Eliav and to carry out a behest of Ptamose so secret and terrible that he was afraid even to think of it, to say nothing of discussing it with anyone.

At the bottom of a deep cauldron-shaped hollow among the rocks of the Arabian hills, east of the City and within half an hour's walk from it, lay the penal settlement of the Israelites sentenced to work in the neighbouring quarries of Hat-Nub. The Egyptians called it the Dirty Jews' Village and the Israelite's name for it was Sheol—Hell.

Some ten days after Aton's nativity, Issachar walked to Sheol to see his brother Eliav.

An old man of seventy, looking like Abraham, with a fine, deeply lined, dark-skinned face and a long white beard, was walking beside him; he was Issachar's uncle, Ahiram, son of Halev, a rich merchant from the town of Tanis. They were climbing by a narrow goat's path one of the hills west of Sheol.

The sun was setting in the red mist, as in a pool of blood, and the bare rocks of yellow sandstone, covered in places with waves of loose sand, glowed with a red hot glow.

"I suppose you took part in the Nut-Amon rising, my boy, didn't you?" Ahiram asked.

"I? Oh, no. I am a peaceful man. And besides the holy father does not allow us to fight," Issachar answered. By 'holy father' he meant Ptamose.

The old man shook his head doubtfully.

"Come, come, you are telling fibs, I see it from your eyes! All of you, priests of Amon, are rebels. But remember, my son, nothing is to be gained by rebellion."

"What is one to do then?" Issachar asked.

The old man stroked his long white beard with a sly smile.

"Why, this; listen. When our forefather, Abraham, went to Egypt from Canaan because of the famine, he said to Sarah, his wife: 'you are a fair woman to look upon; say to the Egyptians you are my sister that it may be well with me for your sake.' She did as he asked and was taken into Pharaoh's house, and it was well with Abraham for her sake and he had sheep and oxen and he-asses, and men-servants and maidservants and she-asses, and camels. And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. This is how it was, my son! Blessed be the children of Israel, the people preserved by the Lord! They shall overthrow their enemies by cunning and not by rebellion or violence," the old man said in conclusion, and his eyes sparkled with Abraham's slyness.

A young eagle flew up from the rock, silvery-grey in the glow of sunset that lighted it from below; the royal bird circled round and round, looking out

for prey in the desert—a baby antelope or a bustard.

"I bare you on eagles' wings and brought you unto myself," Issachar recalled the words of God to Israel. "This is how he bears me now," he thought. He remembered, too, what Ptamose said when he sent him to the City of the Sun: "Be firm and have courage, my son, for the Lord is with you: He will do it for you." And he gave him a small bronze sacrificial knife, with the head of the god Amon-Ra for a handle; Ptamose did not say what the knife was for and Issachar did not ask—he knew.

Recalling this he thrust his hand under his cloak, and feeling the knife hidden in his broad leather belt, clasped its handle firmly and tenderly as a lover clasps the hand of his mistress. "Well, am I afraid?" he thought. "No, not afraid at all: He will do it for me. He bears me and will bring me unto Himself!" And turning to Ahiram he said:

"Dear uncle, will you get me a pass?"

He had wanted to say this for several days, but did not dare to, and he had not known a minute before that he would say it.

"What pass?"

"Into the palace to-morrow."

"Have you gone crazy, my boy? Where am I to get a permit for you with the night coming on?"

"Uncle dear, you can do anything, you know everybody, you have influence. Do get it for me, please do!" Issachar entreated him as though it were a matter of life and death.

"What do you want it for?" Ahiram asked, looking at him attentively.

"To see the king!"

"But you have seen him already."

"Only from a distance. To-morrow is the day of petitions, everybody will be allowed to go right up to the throne. I should see him quite near, face to face. I like him very much. Joy of the Sun, Joy of the Sun, to see him is a joy." Issachar said ecstatically.

"No, you shall not have a pass," Ahiram said decidedly, shaking his head. "God only knows what is in your mind, you might get me into trouble. . . ."

Issachar took a purse from his bosom and producing from it a two-inch sacred scarabee, Kheper, made of beautiful Sinai lapis-lazuli, gave it Ahiram.

The old man seized it greedily, weighed it on his palm and scrutinized it for a few minutes.

"A fine stone," he said at last, divided between the delight of a connoisseur and the wish to beat down the price. "There is a little flaw in it, it looks dull and greenish in one place, but it is a lovely thing all the same. It's from Amon's treasury, isn't it? Did you steal it?"

"What next, uncle! I am not a thief. Holy father gave it to me."

"Oh, what for? Though indeed there are all sorts of fools in the world—some give presents for nothing. How much do you want for it?"

"Nothing, only get me the pass."

The old man's eyes glittered, he examined the stone again, and even tried it with his tongue and teeth; then he stroked his beard with a quick, as it were, thievish movement, and lifting an eyebrow and screwing up one eye, said giving back the stone:

"Look here, my son, don't sleep in the town to-night: there will be a search. The chief of the

guards, Mahu, has got wind of something and is looking for the Nut-Amon rebels. Spend the night in the Goats' cave above Sheol; Naaman will take you there. If I procure the pass I will come there before midnight, and if I don't it will mean things have gone wrong—then save yourself and run away."

Issachar handed him the stone once more, but he did not take it.

"No, I will not take it in advance. Payment is due when the goods are delivered. I am an honest merchant."

He was speaking the truth—he was honest; an honest man and a rogue at the same time, after the manner of Abraham.

"I am sorry for you, my red-haired boy!" he said quietly, with an old man's benignity. "Your brother Eliav has perished for nothing; mind the same thing does not happen to you. . . . Remember, my son: man is born to suffering as a spark flies upward, and yet the sight of the sun is sweet to the living; a living dog is better than a dead lion."

"He has bought my soul for a stone and here he pities me," Issachar marvelled. He looked once more at the eagle still circling in the sky, thought of what was to happen next day and his heart throbbed with joy: "He hears me and will bring me unto himself!"

They climbed to the top of the hill and saw in the hollow below a regular quadrangle of uniform houses, intersected by a network of streets and surrounded by high walls.

The dead desert was all round; not a tree, not a

bush, nothing but stones and sand; in the winter it was a cold grave, in the summer a scorching oven, a true Hell—Sheol.

A stench as though of decaying carrion came from below. Ahiram sniffed and frowned.

"Oho-hoho! It's the human smell, the smell of two-legged cattle. There is no well or spring near, and one can't be forever going to the river to fetch water; they stifle in their own stench, poor things!"

They descended rapidly by the goats' path to the bottom of the valley and approached the entrance to Sheol. Ahiram knocked. A window in the wall was opened, the gatekeeper peeped out and, recognizing the old man, unlocked the gate. He did not mean to admit Issachar, but Ahiram whispered something in his ear, thrust something into his hand and he let them both in.

Long, narrow, perfectly straight streets led from the square at the entrance into the centre of the settlement. One side of each street was a bare wall and the other a uniform row of mud huts that resembled stable stalls; the streets were like prison corridors, the huts like prison cells. There were no storehouses or granaries; all the inhabitants of Sheol received government rations.

Dirty pools with clouds of flies buzzing over them and heaps of filth and dung spread such an evil smell that the whole village seemed to be one enormous heap of refuse.

"I put the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession," the Lord said to Israel. "If the plague be in the walls of the house with hollow strakes, greenish and reddish, the stones in which

the plague is shall be taken away and cast into an unclean place; and if the plague come again and be spread in the house, it is a fretting leprosy; the house shall be broken down."

All the houses in Sheol had such leprosy. Lifeless stones were cankered by filth, and living bodies of men even more so; the unfortunate creatures which came down into Hell while still on earth were covered with rashes, ulcers, spots, festers, and the terrible white scabs of leprosy.

The king in his mercy allowed the prisoners' families to live with them, but this only made matters worse: people were suffering from overcrowding more than ever. "The dirty Jews' wives are fruitful," the gaolers said jeeringly. "In multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven." The Lord blessed Israel, but this blessing turned into a curse; numberless children were born and died, teeming in the filthy place like maggots in carrion.

"Thou hast carried them all away captive.
Thou bindest them by Thy love."

Issachar recalled the king's hymn to the god Aton. "Fine sort of love," he thought, "casting the living into hell!"

Ahiram brought his nephew to Eliav's hut and saying good-bye to him went back to the city to get the pass.

Issachar walked into the half-dark entry. Two mangy sheep dozed in their stall; a sick old mule and a scraggy ass stood dejectedly by an empty water trough: beasts of burden carried stones in the quarry and lived together with the prisoners.

Beside them a decrepit old man, naked but for a ragged loin cloth, sat on a heap of dung and ashes scraping with a potsherd the white scabs of leprosy on his body, with a dull, monotonous wail, like the howling of wind at night. This was Shammai the Righteous, the grandfather of Eliav's wife Naomi.

He had once been rich, happy and respected by all; he had salt mines by the Bitter Lakes and a lot of cattle in the Goshen pastures, and he used to send caravans with wool and salt into Midia. He was a godfearing man and led so blameless a life that he was surnamed 'Righteous.' He had hoped to live to a happy old age and to die filled with days. But it pleased God to test him and he was suddenly deprived of everything. Two of his sons were lost with their caravan in the desert, probably killed by robbers; the other two perished in the rebellion. His son-in-law, who was steward over all his property, falsely accused Shammai of having taken part in the rebellion. The old man was seized and tried; the judges acquitted him, but they had a compact with his son-in-law and robbed him of all he had. Now that he was a beggar all his friends forsook him; his wife died. He thought of Naomi, his favourite granddaughter, and came to live with her in Sheol where he fell ill with leprosy.

Sitting day and night among the ashes, he scraped his scabs with a potsherd and comforted his heart with wailing. All the family had grown so used to his endless wail that they noticed it no more than one notices the creaking of a door, the sound of the wind or the chirping of a grasshopper.

Issachar stopped in the entry and listened.

"Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said there is a man child conceived. Why died I not from the womb? For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept, then had I been at rest. My soul is weary of my life; I will say unto God, do not condemn me; show me wherefore thou contendest with me. Is it good unto thee that thou shouldst destroy the innocent?"

And it seemed to Issachar that Shammai's wail was the lament of the whole people of Israel and, perhaps, of all mankind from the beginning to the end of time.

Walking past Shammai, he entered a dark and narrow room dimly lighted by two small lamps filled with mutton fat, one by the wall, on a wooden shelf with little clay idols of the gods Elohim, and another on the low brick platform with a block of stone on it that served as a table.

Eliav was having supper at that table with his two guests—Aviezer, a priest, and Naaman, a prophet.

Aviezer was a stout, important-looking man with red cheeks and a black beard. His luxurious dress of Phoenician patterned material was not very clean; a number of rings with imitation stones glittered on his fingers. He came to Sheol bringing alms for the prisoners from the rich Goshen merchants.

Naaman, a plumber and a prophet—*nabi*—was a little bald old man, gentle, shy and timid, with the kind and simple face of a poor Israelite labourer. He came from Thebes with Issachar.

There were other visitors present, but they sat at

a distance and took no part in the supper or the conversation.

When Issachar saw his brother, a tall, round-shouldered, bony man, with a face so deeply lined that it seemed crumpled, everything else suddenly vanished from his eyes and he only saw this face—familiar, strange, pitiful, dear, and terrible.

"Ah, so you have arrived at last; I began to think you weren't coming," Eliav said, getting up.

Issachar went up to him and was going to embrace him when Eliav seized his hands with a quick movement and holding him back looked into his eyes with a laugh:

"Well, I should think we might embrace each other, or is it beneath your dignity?" he said, as though it had been Issachar who held himself back.

Issachar threw his arms round Eliav's neck.

"Well, sit down," said Eliav, disengaging himself and pointing to the place of honour by his side—a low, half-circular stone chair. "You see, we are feasting here, enjoying your gifts without you. Thank you for remembering us and sending alms to us poor beggars. I dare not offer you anything: you Egyptians think our Jewish food unclean!"

"Why do you say such things, brother?" Issachar began, but broke off, looking down and flushing crimson. He took a piece off the dish.

"Why, he is eating! He really is, he doesn't despise our food!" Eliav cried, with the same unkind smile.

Aviezer also smiled into his beard, and Naaman anxiously looked round at them all with his kind eyes.

"Perhaps you will have a drink, too?" Eliav asked.

Issachar moved up his cup and Eliav filled it from a jug with pomegranate wine, blood-red and thick as oil—also his brother's present. He poured some out for himself, also.

"Your health, Iserker!"

He swallowed it at one gulp.

"Splendid wine this! I have never drunk anything like it."

He poured out some more. His wife, Naomi, a young, worn-looking woman with child, came up to him and whispered in his ear:

"You must not take any more, sir."

"Why not? I haven't seen my brother all these years and I mayn't have a drink on the occasion?"

He rudely pushed her away, giving her such a blow on the stomach with his elbow that she nearly fell.

"Oh, my dears, please don't let him drink, there will be trouble!" she begged the guests, retreating submissively like a beaten dog.

"A second cup to the success of your errand!" Eliav said. "You must have come to us on business I expect, and not for the pleasure of seeing your brother. Well, speak up, Iserker! What have you come for?"

"Issachar, not Iserker," his brother corrected him, paling slightly and frowning.

"Issachar in Hebrew and Iserker in Egyptian," Eliav answered. 'Do you know yourself what your name is, I wonder? There now, don't be cross, don't look at me like Abel. I know you want to be an

Abel, but I am not a Cain. . . Rabbi, what did Cain kill Abel for?" he asked Aviezer.

"Because God accepted Abel's gift and rejected Cain's."

"And why did God reject it?"

"No one knows this."

"That's always the way: no one knows the chief thing. But that was just the beginning of it all. The beginning was bad and I expect the end will be bad, too. . . . Well then, tell me what news have you brought us, Abel?"

"Good news, brother: the Lord has heard at last the cry of Israel. You will soon leave Sheol, captives. . . . Nabi Naaman, you are God's prophet, you know it all better than I do. Speak!"

Naaman shook his head, with a shy smile.

"Prophet, indeed! I am a simple man: all my wisdom is in mending cauldrons and saucepans . . ."

"Never mind, speak; God will teach you!"

The old man looked down and was silent for a time; then he began timidly and in a low voice, obviously repeating somebody else's words:

"Thus speaks the Lord of Sabaoth, the God of Israel: strengthen your arms which have grown weak, steady your knees that tremble. Behold your God! He shall come and save you; He shall stretch out his arm, He shall judge and lead his people out of Egypt, as out of the house of bondage. The second Exodus will be greater than the first, and the new Leader of Israel greater than Moses!"

He raised his eyes and his voice rang out with sudden force:

"How long, O Lord, shall the ungodly triumph?

They trample upon thy people, they oppress thine inheritance, God of vengeance, Lord God of vengeance, show thyself, punish the proud! The Lord is to sit in judgment upon the peoples; He shall be judge of all flesh!"

"He is rather slow about it," Eliav said, with a jeering smile and, as though in answer to him, Shammai's wail was heard:

"Behold I cry out of wrong but I am not heard; I cry aloud and there is no judgment! Why does God mock the torture of the innocent? Why do the wicked live and spend their days in wealth? Why is the earth given over to evildoers and God gives them countenance? If it is not His doing, whose doing is it?"

"Do you hear?" Eliav asked, looking straight into Issachar's eyes. "Shammai is right: there is no judgment of God in the doings of men. All your prophecies are empty babble. The earth is a paradise for evildoers and a hell for the innocent, a Sheol. You are wretched comforters, useless physicians, all of you, damnation upon you and your God!"

Aviezar looked at Eliav and said, "Do not blaspheme, my son. Woe to him who disputes with his Maker."

"And what do you say, brother?" Eliav asked, still looking straight into Issachar's eyes. "Is Shammai right?"

"Yes, he is."

"Who is to answer him, then?"

"The Redeemer."

"And who is the Redeemer?"

"You know yourself."

"No, I don't. So many prophets come to us—not you alone. Some say that King Akhnaton is the Redeemer. Perhaps you have come to us from him?"

"Why do you laugh, brother, why do you jeer at what is holy?"

"But do you think you know what is holy? Is it true, they say you have been converted to the king's faith?"

"No, it is not."

"How is it, then, you were seen the other day at the festival of the Sun, among the converts? Whom are you deceiving, them or us? Why are you silent? Speak!"

"What am I to say, brother? You won't believe me in any case. Wait till to-morrow—to-morrow you shall know all."

"To-morrow? No, tell me at once, at once, what do you mean by saying 'you will soon leave Sheol, captives'? We shall not leave it without a rebellion. Have you come to stir us up, then?"

"You shall know everything to-morrow," Issachar repeated, getting up.

Eliav got up, too, and seized him by the hand.

"Stop, you shan't go like this! If you won't tell us, you will tell the king's overseer!"

"Will you inform against me?"

"And why not? An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. I have suffered for ten years on your account, and now it is your turn. Come along!"

"Oh, my dears, hold him, hold him, there will be trouble!" Naomi cried again.

All rushed at Eliav, but before they had time to restrain him, he dashed to the corner, seized the

copper pickaxe, with which he broke stones in the quarry, ran towards Issachar, and raised it over his head, shouting:

"Get out of my sight, you son of the stinking Goat, or I'll kill you!"

Issachar ran out of the house, covering his face with his hands.

He ran along the dark streets, stumbling, falling, getting up, and running on again in terror.

He only came to himself outside the Sheol gates. Naaman had been running beside him and saying to him something he could not make out; at last he grasped that Naaman said:

"Let us run to the Goats' Cave and spend the night there."

By a steep narrow footpath cut in the rock, they ascended from the Sheol valley to the open ground at the top of the hill. A small red light flickered in the distance. They walked towards it. Fierce sheep dogs, with heads like spiders, rushed at them barking.

An old shepherd came out to meet them; he drove away the dogs and welcomed his guests with a low bow, calling Naaman by name. He had evidently been expecting them and led them straight to the cave at the top of the cliff overhanging Sheol.

Two young shepherds, who had been sitting by the bonfire in the cave among a sleeping flock of goats and sheep, got up and also made a low bow. They put more wood on the fire, spread some sheepskins on the ground, and wishing their guests goodnight, went out together with the old shepherd.

Issachar and Naaman sat down by the fire.

"Man is born to suffering as a spark flies upward," Issachar recalled Ahiram's words as he gazed at the sparks in the smoking fire and he thought "Tomorrow Eliav will learn everything and will forgive and love me."

He lay down and as soon as he closed his eyes began to descend by the dark subterranean passages into the Nut-Amon sanctuary of the god Ram; he went on and on, but he could not reach it—he had lost his way. A small red light flickered in the distance. He walked towards it. The light grew bigger and bigger and became at last a red sun upon the black sky. Someone was standing under it, dressed in white, with a face as gentle as that of the god whose name is Quiet Heart. A quiet voice said, "Thou, Father, art in my heart and no one knows thee but me, thy son." "Cursed be the deceiver who said 'I am the Son'," Issachar cried, and drawing the knife from his belt was about to strike him. But he saw the red blood flowing on the white robe. "They shall look upon him whom they pierced and shall mourn for Him as for a son," he recalled the prophecy, and, throwing down the knife, flung himself at the feet of the Pierced One, crying "Who are you?"

"Ahiram, your uncle, who did you think I was? Come, wake up, my son," he heard Ahiram's voice and woke up.

"What is the matter with you, my boy? Have you had a bad dream?" the old man said, stroking Issachar's hair affectionately. "See, here is your pass!"

He took a clay tablet from his bosom and gave it

to Issachar: the king's seal—the sun disc of Aton—was at the top, next to the date of the month and below was the signature 'Tutankhaton.'

Issachar took the tablet and gazed at it, still trembling, so that his teeth chattered.

"Give me the stone!" Ahiram said, looking at him suspiciously, wondering if he would refuse payment.

Issachar took the stone out of his purse and gave it to Ahiram.

"But why are you so frightened? Have you changed your mind? Won't you go?" the old man said.

"Yes, I will go," Issachar answered.

VI

oor queen! To give the god hot fomentations when he has stomach-ache and still believe that he is a god is no joke," the old courtier Ay said, laughing.

Tuta, who was very fond of witty remarks, repeated it to Dio in a moment of confidence, and she often recalled it as she looked at Queen Nefertiti.

Mother of six children at the age of twenty-eight, she still looked like a girl: slender girlish waist, bosom only slightly marked, narrow shoulders, collar bones that stood out under the skin, a thin long neck—'like a giraffe's,' she used herself to say jokingly. The round face looked childishly tender under the high bucket-shaped royal tiara, worn low over the forehead so that no hair showed. There was something childishly piteous in the short slightly protruding upper lip; there was an inward brooding look and a fathomless depth of sadness in the big lustreless, rather slanting black eyes under the heavy drooping eyelids.

She seemed to be all on guard, as though listening, spell-bound, to something within herself, motionless as an arrow on the bow string or a chord stretched to the uttermost but not sounding as yet; if it did sound it would break. It was as though

she had received a mortal wound and were concealing it from all.

Daughter of Tadukhipa, a princess of Mitanni, and Amenhotep the Third, king of Egypt, Queen Nefertiti was King Akhnaton's half-sister: kings of Egypt, children of the Sun, often married their sisters in order to preserve the purity of the race.

The king and queen were so much alike that when, as boy and girl, they used to wear almost the same clothes, people found it hard to distinguish them. There was the same languid charm about them, the charm of a half-opened flower drooping with the heat of the sun.

> "Oh plant that never tasted running water,
> Oh flower, plucked out by the roots."

Dio recalled the dirge for the dead god Tammuz when she looked at the bas-relief of the king and queen in one of the palace chambers. They were represented sitting side by side on a double throne; she had her left arm round his waist, the fingers of the right hand were intertwined with his fingers and their faces were so close together that one could hardly see her through him; he was in her and she in him. As it said in the hymn to Aton:

> "When Thou didst establish the earth
> Thou didst reveal thy will to me
> Thy son Akhnaton Uaenra,
> And to thy beloved daughter
> Nefertiti, delight of the Son
> Who flourishes for ever and ever!"

It was then that this brother's and sister's marriage was made.

"They cannot be loved separately, they must be

loved together—two in one," Dio understood this at once.

After her dance on the day of Aton's Nativity, she received the rank of 'the chief fan-bearer on the right side of the gracious god-king' and, leaving Tuta's house, settled in the palace where a room was assigned to her in the women's quarters close to the queen's chambers. She soon made friends with the queen, but a barrier which she herself could not understand separated her from the king.

She was no longer afraid of his being 'not quite human': she had learned from the queen that he certainly was human. There was profound meaning in the flat joke about 'the god having stomach-ache.' And the horror that the king's blasphemous words about being 'the son of God' had inspired in her at the festival of the Sun had disappeared, too: all kings of Egypt called themselves 'sons of God.'

She felt no fear, but something that was perhaps worse than fear.

It used to happen in the autumn when she was hunting on Mount Ida in Crete that on a bright, sunny day mist suddenly crept up from the mountain gorges, and the molten gold of the forest, the blue sky, the blue sea grew dim and grey and the sun itself looked out of the fog like a dead fish's eye. "What if the Joy of the Sun, Akhnaton, also looks at me with the eyes of a dead fish?" she thought.

She danced for him every day, and he admired her. "Only a dancer—I will never be anything more

for him," she said to herself, with a grey fog of boredom in her mind.

She stood for hours behind the king's throne, raising and lowering with a slow, measured movement, in accordance with the ancient ritual, the big ostrich-feather fan on a long pole. Sometimes when left alone with her he turned suddenly and smiled at her with such appealing tenderness that her heart stood still at the thought that he would speak and the barrier would fall. But he said nothing or spoke about trifles: asked whether she was tired and would like to sit down; or wondered at the quickness with which she had learned to wave the fan—an art more difficult than it appeared; or, with jesting courtesy, blessed the stupid old custom of keeping cool in winter and fanning away the non-existent flies because it gave him a chance of being with her.

One day Dio was reluctantly—she did not like talking about it—telling the queen who questioned her how she had killed the god Bull on the Knossos arena to avenge a human victim, her best friend, Eoia; how she had been sentenced to be burned and was saved by Tammuzadad, the Babylonian, who went to the stake in her place.

The king was present, too, and seemed to listen attentively. When Dio finished there were tears in the queen's eyes, but the king, as though coming to himself suddenly, glanced at them both with a strange quiet smile, and muttered hurriedly and excitedly, repeating the same words, as he often did:

"You mustn't shave it off! You mustn't shave it off!"

It was so inappropriate that Dio was alarmed and wondered if he were ill. But the queen smiled calmly and said, laying her hand on Dio's head:

"No, certainly not: it would be a pity to shave such beautiful hair!"

It was only then that Dio remembered that she had asked the queen a day or two ago whether she ought to shave her head and wear a wig, as the custom in Egypt was.

After saying these sudden words the king went out and the queen, as though apologizing for him, said that he had not been very well lately.

It took Dio some time to forget that at that moment she had caught a glimpse of the decrepit monster of Gem-ton— that the sun looked through the fog like a dead fish's eye.

The same evening when he was left alone with her, he got up suddenly, put his hands on her shoulders and brought his face near hers, as though he would kiss her; but did not—he merely smiled so that her heart stood still: she recalled the girl-like boy with a face as gentle as the face of the god whose name is Quiet-Heart.

A man dreams sometimes a dream of paradise, as though in sleep his soul had returned to its heavenly home; and on waking he cannot believe that it has been a dream only, cannot get used to his earthly exile and is full of sadness and yearning: such was the sadness in his face. The long lashes of the drooping eyelids, as though weighed down with sleep, seemed moist with tears, but there was a smile on the lips—a trace of paradise—heavenly joy shining through earthly sorrow like the sun through a cloud.

"I heard everything you said this afternoon, only I did not want to speak before her: one may not speak about this to anyone. You know this, don't you?" he asked, looking at her with the same smile.

"I know," Dio answered.

"Darling, how good it is that you came, how I have been waiting for you!"

He brought his face still nearer so that their lips almost touched.

"Do you love me?" he asked as simply as a child.

"I love you," she answered, as simply.

And it was a joy like a dream of paradise that he left her without a kiss.

On the following day, the eleventh after Aton's nativity, Dio was standing with her fan behind the queen's chair in the palace-chamber of the Flood, in which the flooding of the Nile was depicted.

The morning sun shone through the melting mist of the clouds into the square opening of the ceiling, adorned with faience wreaths of vine, with dark red clusters of grapes and dark blue leaves. The tiled walls were painted with water-flowers and plants, the pillars, shaped like sheaves of papyrus, had for capitals figures of wild geese and ducks hanging head downwards—the spoils of river hunting; the paintings on the floor represented a backwater on the Nile; fishes swam among the blue, wavy lines of the river, butterflies fluttered among the lotos thickets, ducklings flew up, and an absurd spotted calf galloped about with its tail in the air. As it said in the morning hymn to Aton:

"The earth rejoices and is glad
All cattle graze in pastures green,
All plants are growing in the fields,
The birds are flying o'er their nests,
And lift their wings like hands in prayer,
Lambs leap and dance upon their feet.
All winged things fly gaily round,
They all live in thy life, O Lord!"

The king was playing with his six daughters: Meritatona, Makitatona, Ankhsenbatona, Neferatona, Neferura and Setepenra. The eldest was fifteen, the youngest five and there was a year's difference between the others. When they stood in a row to say their prayers, their smoothly shaven egg-shaped heads—royal marrows—formed a series of descending steps, like the reeds on a shepherd's pipe.

The four elder girls were dressed in shifts of transparent linen—'woven air'—and the two youngest were quite naked. Their arms and legs, thin as sticks were almost brown; they wore heavy gold rings in their ears and broad necklaces of crystal and chrysolite tears arranged like rays round their necks.

The king's dwarf, Iagu, took part in the games; he came of the wild tribe of Pygmies, Ua-Ua, who lived like monkeys in the trees of the marshy forests in the extreme South. Two feet in height, bow-legged, fat-bellied, black, wrinkled, old and monstrous like the god Bes, the primaeval monster, he looked ferocious but was in truth as mild as a lamb; he was a splendid dancer and an unwearying nurse to the princesses who loved and tormented him; a faithful servant of the king's household, he would have gladly died for each and all of them.

First they played 'nine-pins,' rolling ivory balls through reed hoops so as to knock down at one blow nine wooden dolls with ugly faces—nine kings hostile to Egypt.

Then Iagu's pupil, the trained white poodle, Dang, with a cap of fiery red feathers on its head and ruby earrings, jumped through a hoop and walked on its hind legs, holding a marshall's staff in its front paws and a piece of antelope meat on its nose, not daring to swallow it until Iagu cried "eat."

Then they went into the winter hot-house garden, where there were rare foreign flowers and an ornamental pool with floating lotuses, and made two dreadful monsters of clay—the Babylonian king, Burnaburiash and his son, prince Karakardash, who wanted to marry the eight year old princess Neferatona. The king was so smeared with clay that he had to be washed in the pool.

Then they amused themselves with the cock—the bird, unknown in Egypt, had just been brought from the kingdom of Mitanni; upset by its long journey, the cock ruffled its feathers in gloomy silence, but suddenly flapped its wings and crowed for the first time so loudly that all were frightened and then delighted—'a regular trumpet'!—and began to imitate him; the king did it so badly that the girls laughed at him.

Then they returned to the chamber and played blind man's buff. Iagu caught the king, who then had his eyes bandaged. The girls jumped about and scurried to and fro under his very nose, strummed on citherns, stamped with their bare feet on the floor, imitating the oxen threshing and sang a song:

"Hey! Hey! Hey!
It's fine and fresh to-day,
Fine workmen, oxen,
Work, work away!
Stamp upon the threshing floor!
You'll have something for your trouble,
We'll have the grain and you the straw!"

The king, awkwardly spreading out his arms, kept catching empty air or embracing pillars. At last he caught Ankhi, Tuta's twelve year old wife.

"You moved the bandage," she cried. "There, the left eye is peeping out! You mustn't cheat, abby!"

'Abby' was the diminutive from the Canaan word *Abba*—father.

"No, I haven't, it slid off," the king tried to justify himself.

"You have moved it, you have!" Ankhi kept on shouting. "I know you, abby, you are a dreadful little rogue! But that's not the way to play. You must catch again."

She bandaged his eyes tighter than before and he had to catch them again.

The poodle, Dang, as though also playing, walked about on its hind legs holding a sounding cithern in its front paws. The king, imagining from the sound, that it was the little Zeta—Zetepenra—bent down rapidly and threw his arms round Dang. The dog barked and licked him in the face. The king cried out in alarm, sat down on the floor and pushed Dang away. But it rushed up to him again, put its front paws on the king's shoulders and licked him squealing with delight.

All laughed and shouted.

"Abby has kissed Dang! Doggy has made friends with the king."

The queen laughed, too.

"There, you've done enough fanning, sit down and rest," she said to Dio, and Dio sat down at the foot of her chair.

"The kingdom is for the children," she suddenly recalled aloud the king's words that she had heard from little Ankhi.

"The kingdom is for the children," the queen repeated. "And do you know how it goes on?"

"How?"

"What is most divine in men? Tears of the wise? No, laughter of children."

"So this is why the god Aton has children's hands for rays?" Dio asked.

"Yes, the whole of wisdom is in this: what is childlike is divine," the queen answered and, gently placing her hand on Dio's head, looked straight into her eyes.

"How is it you are so pretty to-day? Have you fallen in love by any chance?" she said, smiling—'quite like him—' Dio thought.

"Why fallen in love?" she asked, smiling, too.

"Because when girls are in love they grow particularly pretty."

Dio shook her head, blushed and bending quickly down, caught the queen's hand and began kissing it eagerly, as though she were kissing *him* through her.

Suddenly she felt the queen's hand tremble. Raising her eyes and seeing that the queen was looking at the door, she, too, looked in the same direction. Merira, son of Nehtaneb, the high priest of the god Aton, was standing in the doorway.

Dio had been struck by his face at the festival of the Sun and since then she often looked at him wondering whether she felt repelled or attracted by him.

He somewhat resembled Tammuzadad: there was the same stony heaviness about their faces; but there had been something childlike and piteous in the Babylonian's face, while Merira looked hopelessly grown up. There was a stony heaviness in the low overhanging brows, in the eyes immoveably intent and yet, as it were, unseeing, the wide cheekbones, the firmly set jaw and the tightly closed lips that seemed sealed with bitterness and were always ready to jeer, though they could never smile.

"He that increases knowledge increases sorrow," Dio recalled Tammuzadad's words as she looked at that face. "To know all is to despise all," it seemed to say, "not to curse, but merely to despise in secret, to spew out of one's mouth." If a very courageous man firmly determined on suicide had drunk poison and then calmly awaited death, his face would wear the same expression.

Merira came of a very old family of the Heliopolis priests of the Sun. He had once been the favourite pupil of Ptamose and an ardent devotee of Amon; but he gave up the old faith and worshipped Aton. The king was very fond of him. "You alone have followed my teaching, no one else has," he said, when he conferred on Merira the rank of high priest.

Merira came in while the king was sitting on the floor and the poodle, Dang, with its paws on his

shoulders, was licking his face and the princesses were laughing and shouting.

"Abby has kissed Dang! Doggie has made friends with the king."

Merira probably failed to notice the queen and stopped in the doorway looking intently at the king. The queen, bending slightly forward and craning her neck, looked at Merira as intently as he did at the king.

"Merira, Merira!" she cried suddenly and there was fear in her eyes. "Why do you look at the king like that, do you want to cast a spell over him?" she laughed, but there was fear in her laughter.

He slowly turned to her and made the low ceremonial bow, bending down from his waist and stretching out his hands, palms upwards.

"Rejoice, queen Nefertiti, the delight of the Sun's delights! I have come to call the king to the Council. It seems I have come at the wrong moment."

"Why wrong? Go and tell the king."

Merira went up to the players. Laughter died down. The king jumped up and looked at him with a guilty smile.

"What is it, Merira?"

"Nothing, sire. You were pleased to call the Council for to-day."

"Oh yes, the Council! I had forgotten. . . . . Well, let us go, let us go!" he hurried.

The bandage he had round his eyes during the game was dangling on his neck; he tried to pull it off, but could not —it got tied into a knot. Ankhi went up to him, undid the knot and took off the

bandage, while Rita—Meritatona—put on his head the royal tiara he had taken off for the game.

The girls' faces fell. The poodle slightly growled at Merira and the dwarf made funny and frightful faces at him behind the king's back. It was as though a shadow had come upon everything and the sun had grown dim and looked like a 'fish's eye.'

As the king walked past the queen and Dio he looked at them dejectedly and resignedly like a schoolboy going to a dull lesson.

Dio glanced at the queen.

"Yes follow him," she said, and Dio followed the king.

He looked round at her with a grateful smile and Merira looked at them both with his usual mute derision.

VII

THE three walked into the Council Chamber. The dignitaries had long been gathered there waiting for the king. When he passed by them they prostrated themselves, sniffed the ground under his feet and, raising their shaven, egg-shaped heads stretched out their hands palms upwards, saying:

"Rejoice, Akhnaton, Joy of the Sun!"

Tuta, as usual, surpassed them all.

"My king, my god, who hast made me, grant me to enjoy the sight of thy face forever!" he exclaimed, rolling his eyes so ecstatically that everyone envied him.

The king sat down in his chair on a low alabaster platform between four pillars. Dio stood behind him with the fan.

All looked at her curiously. She felt she was already regarded as the king's mistress; she flushed and looked down.

A bodyguard of Hittite amazons stood in the depths of the many pillared room. The dignitaries sat on their heels in a semicircle on mats on the floor; only three sat on folding chairs: Tuta, Merira, and the commander-in-chief and king's vizier, Ramose, a heavy fat old man of seventy, with a

red puffy face, like an old woman's, a courtly smile on his lips and small eyes lost in fat, very kind and intelligent.

Grandson of General Amenemheb, fellow-soldier of the great Tutmose the Third, the Conqueror, he had covered himself with glory in the different campaigns he led against the wild tribes of Kush and the Sinai nomads. He had been promoted to the rank of Vizier under King Amenhotep the Third, Akhnaton's father, and the people were fond of him and called him 'a just man.' He would have given his life for the king, but he regarded the new faith in Aton and the betrayal of the old gods as madness and disaster. "The best and most unfortunate of kings," he used to say about Akhnaton, "he is ruining himself and his kingdom for nothing."

The sitting of the Council began. The king listened to the officials' reports about the failure of crops, famine, rebellions, brigandage, robberies, bribe-taking, secessions of provincial governors and feuds between them.

Standing slightly on one side Dio could see his face. He listened with his head bent and his face seemed expressionless.

The chief of the guards, Mahu, reported on the last rising—the one in Thebes.

"Very likely nothing would have happened had not the Lybian mercenaries joined the rebels," he said in conclusion.

"And why did they join them?" the king asked.

"Because their salary was not paid in time."

"And why was it not paid?"

"At the prince Viceroy's orders."

The king looked at Tuta.

"Why did you do it?"

"I have laid the king's yoke upon my neck and here I bear it," Tuta began, wondering what kind of answer he had better give: he understood that someone had informed against him. "If I go up to heaven or come down to earth my life is always in thy right hand, O King! I look here and I look there and I see no light; I look upon thee, my king, my sun, and behold, here is light! A brick may move from under other bricks in a wall but I shall not move from under the feet of my king, my god. . . . "

"Make haste and tell me why you did it," the king interrupted him impatiently.

"There was no money to buy bread for the starving and so I borrowed it from the Lybians' salary."

The king said nothing, but gave him such a look that Tuta lowered his eyes.

"How many killed?" asked the king, turning to Mahu again.

"Less than a hundred," he answered.

He knew that more than two thousand had been killed, but, exchanging glances with Ramose, understood that the truth should not be told: the king would be unhappy and perhaps fall ill and nothing would be gained by it—everything would remain as before.

"A hundred people!" the king whispered, bending his head still lower. "Well, you won't have long now. . . . . "

"Not long to do what, sire?" Ramose asked.

"To kill people in my name!" the king answered

and then asked, after a pause: Is there a letter from Ribaddi?"

"Yes, there is."

"Show it me."

"I cannot, sire, it is an unseemly letter."

"Never mind, show it."

Ramose gave him the letter. The king read it first to himself and then aloud so calmly that it might have been written about someone else:

> "Ribaddi, Viceroy of the King of Egypt in Canaan, thus speaks to the King: for ten years I have been sending to thee for help but thou hast not helped me. Now Aziru, an Amorite, a traitor, has risen against thee and gone over to the king of the Hittites. And they have gathered together chariots and men to conquer Canaan. The enemy is at my gates, to-morrow they will enter and kill me and throw my body to the dogs. Well does the King of Egypt reward his faithful servants! May the gods do the same unto thee as thou hast done unto me. My blood is on thy head, traitor!"

"How dares this dead dog insult our god-king!" Tuta said, with indignation.

The king looked at him again, and he subsided.

"Has Ribaddi perished?" the king asked.

"He has," Ramose answered. "He threw himself on his sword so as not to fall into the enemies' hands alive."

"What will happen now, Ramose?"

"Why, this, sire: the king of the Hittites will have Canaan; the thieves will undermine the wall and enter the house. We were for four hundred years under the yoke of the nomads, and we may be for another four hundred under the yoke of the Hittites. Your great-grandfather, Tutmose the Great, made Egypt the head of all nations and we were the

light of the world and now this light is no more. . . ."

"What are we to do then, Ramose?"

"You know yourself, king."

"Begin war?" the king asked.

Ramose made no answer; he knew that the king would perish and ruin his kingdom rather than begin war.

The king was silent, too; he seemed lost in thought. Suddenly he raised his head and said:

"I cannot!"

He paused again, thinking, and repeated:

"I cannot; no, I cannot! 'Peace, peace to the far and the near,' says my heavenly father, Aton. 'Peace is better than war; let there be no war, let there be peace!' This is all I know, all I have, Ramose. If you take this from me, there will be nothing left: I shall be destitute, naked, dead. Better kill me outright!"

He spoke simply and quietly; but Dio's heart throbbed again as on the day before in the joy of the heavenly dream. She suddenly recalled the huge pale phantom of Cheop's pyramid shimmering in the rosy sunlight mist over the yellow sands of the desert: the perfect triangles—"I began to be as one god, but three gods were in Me," in the words of the ancient wisdom—divine triangles getting narrower and narrower, more and more pointed as they rose to heaven and in the very last point the same frenzied ecstacy as in Akhnaton's quiet word 'Peace'!

"O, how sweet is thy teaching, Uaenra," Tuta thrust himself forward again—like the poodle Dang licking the king in the face. "You are the second Osiris, conquering the world by peace and not by

sword. If you say to the water "let there be peace'—there shall be peace."

"Listen, Ramose," the king began, "I am not such a scoundrel as Ribaddi thought, and I am not such a fool as Tuta takes me to be. . . ."

The poodle Dang got a flip on the nose: he was alarmed and upset. But he was soon comforted by Ay—an old dignitary with intelligent, cold and cynical eyes, who sat next to him.

"Don't bother, it isn't worth it," he whispered in Tuta's ear. "You see he is playing the fool again, the crazy saint!"

"I am not such a fool as Tuta thinks," the king went on. "I know there will be no peace on earth for a long time to come. There will be endless war, and the longer it goes on the fiercer it will be: 'all will be killing each other' as the ancient prophecy says. There has been a flood of water—there is going to be one of blood. But even so, even so, let men know that there has been in the world a man who said 'peace'!"

He suddenly turned to Merira.

"What do you think, Merira? Why do you smile?"

"I think, sire, that what you say is good, but it is not all. God is not only peace. . . ."

He spoke slowly, with an effort, as though thinking of something else.—

"But also what?" the king said to help him.

"Also war."

"What are you saying, my friend? War is not of God, but of the devil."

"Yes, of God, too. Two sides of the triangle

meet at one point: day and night, mercy and wrath, peace and war, Son and Father—all the opposites are in God. . . ."

"Is the Son against the Father?" the king asked and his hand that was holding the arm of the chair trembled slightly.

Merira raised his eyes to him and smiled so strangely that Dio thought 'madman!' But he looked down again at once and his face turned to stone, grew heavy with a stony heaviness.

"Why do you ask me?" he answered calmly. "You know it all better than I, Uaenra: does not the Son know the Father? God is the measure of all things. I say it not to you but to others: seek for measure in everything—in peace as in the sword."

"Quite so! Quite so!" Ramose cried. "I am no friend of yours, Merira, but for this saying I am ready to bow down at your feet—it couldn't be said better!"

"Why are you so pleased with it?" the king asked, looking at Ramose in surprise. "What he says is very dreadful."

"Yes, dreadful, but necessary," Ramose answered. "Ankh-em-Maat, You-Who-live-in-Truth, you want to lift truth up to heaven and spread it throughout the earth; but men are weak, stupid and wicked. Be merciful to them, O King, don't ask too much of them. If you fix a ladder for them they will climb up, but if you say 'fly,' they will fly headlong into the pit. There is no getting on with mercy only: our mercy merely smooths the way for evildoers. We talk much and we do little, but believe an old man like me: nothing in the world is

more wicked than empty good words, nothing more vile than empty noble words."

"Are you speaking of me, Ramose?" the king asked, with a kind smile.

"No, not of you, Uaenra, but of those who demand a miracle of you and do not stir a finger themselves. For twenty years I have served faithfully the king, your father, and you; I have never told lies and I am not going to now. Things are going ill in your whole kingdom, they are going very ill, O King! We say 'peace,' but there is war, we say 'love,' but there is hatred, we say 'light,' but there is darkness instead."

He got up heavily, fell at the king's feet and wept: "Have pity, sire; have mercy! Save yourself, save Egypt, take up the sword for right and justice. And if you do not want to do it, I don't want to see you ruin yourself and your kingdom any more. Let me retire, I am old and want a rest!"

The king bent down to him and lifting him up embraced and kissed him on the lips.

"No my friend, I will not let you go, and you would not go yourself—you are fond of me . . . Bear up a little longer, the time is getting short—I shall soon go myself," he whispered in his ear.

"Go where? Where?" Ramose asked with prophetic terror.

"Don't speak, don't ask, you will soon know everything!" the king answered and got up, showing that the Council was over.

VIII

EAVING the Council Chamber, they went to the Beggars' Court. Telling the courtiers to go on, the king lagged behind so as to remain alone with Dio. Passing through a number of rooms they came into a small hothouse garden where incense trees brought from the far-away Punt, the land of the gods, grew in pots of earthenware, like huge heather plants fine as cobweb, dropping amber rosin tears in the warm sunshine.

The king sank down on a bench and sat for some minutes in silence without moving. He seemed to have forgotten Dio's presence, but suddenly he looked at her and said:

"Shame! Shame! Shame! You have looked enough at my shame, go away!"

Dio knelt down before him.

"No, sire, I will not go away from you. As the Lord lives and as my soul lives, whither my king goes, to shame or to honour, there will his servant go also."

"You have seen me put to shame once, now you will see it again. Let us go," the king said, getting up.

They entered the Beggars Court.

Three times in the year—when the Nile over-

flowed, at seed time, and at harvest—the palace gates were opened to all; every beggar could go in freely, merely giving his name to Mahu, the chief of the guards. Tables with bread, meat and beer were placed in the courtyard: everyone could eat and drink his fill. It was there that the king received petitions and heard complaints.

During the first years of Akhnaton's reign these feasts were more frequent. "Let every ninth day of the month be a day for beggars," it said in the king's decree. Governors of provinces were on that day to distribute to the hungry corn from the king's granaries "for the cry of the needy has come up unto heaven and our heart is sore." "Amon is the god of the rich and Aton the god of the poor," the king preached. "Woe unto you, you sleek and rich who acquire house after house and field after field, so that there is no room on the earth left for others! Your hands are full of blood. Wash, cleanse yourselves, learn to do good. Save the oppressed, defend the orphan, protect the widow. Provide bread for the hungry, water for the thirsty, clothes for the naked, shelter for the homeless, smiles for the weeping. Undo the bondsmen's yoke and set the slaves free: then shall your light shine in darkness and your night shall be as midday!"

"Ankh-em-maat, You-Who-live-in-Truth," the king's disciples said to him, "you will make the poor equal with the rich, will efface the boundaries between fields as the river flood effaces them. You are a multitude of Niles, flooding the earth with the waters of inexhaustible love!"

The king had invented a dangerous game of

throwing gold to the beggars like fire into straw. For many years Mahu, the chief of the guards, had saved the situation: collecting trustworthy people from among the palace servants he dressed them up as beggars and promised the well-behaved a fair share of the spoils and the unruly—the lash; and all had gone well. The king was short-sighted; from the High Place where he sat while throwing the gold money rings into the crowd, he could not recognize the faces below.

But someone informed against Mahu. The king was very angry and nearly dismissed him from his post; and next time Mahu had to admit real, not dressed up beggars. Then there was trouble: no sooner did the rain of gold begin to fall than people grew savage, a free fight began and a whole detachment of armed soldiers had difficulty in quieting the crowd. There were three killed and many wounded. The king fell ill with grief, gold rained no more, but food was still given away and petitions received.

The Beggars Court was a large quadrangle paved with slabs of alabaster and surrounded by two storeys of pillared arcades. At one end of it was the High Place—the king's tabernacle. A wide, gradually ascending staircase of alabaster led to it. The goddess, Nekhbet, the Falcon Sun-mother, with a white head and a red, scaly body, was soaring above the tabernacle holding a golden ring—the royal globe, in its claws. "As the mother comforts her children so will I comfort you," the king, son of the Sun, said to the sorrowful children of the earth.

"Down! down! down! the king comes! The god comes!" the runners cried and the whole crowd in the court prostrated themselves, crying out:

"Rejoice, Akhnaton, Joy of the Sun!"

Besides beggars and petitioners there were, in the crowd, many sick, blind, halt and lame, because people believed that everyone who touched the king's clothes or upon whom his shadow fell was healed.

"Defend us, save us, have mercy, O Lord!" they called to him, like the souls in hell to the god who came down to them.

The king ascended the steps to the tabernacle and sat on his throne. Dio stood behind him with the fan.

The guards admitted the petitioners through a narrow passage between two low walls of stone along the foot of the stairs. Two Nubian soldiers with naked swords guarded the door in the middle of the wall adjoining the staircase. Approaching this door every petitioner prostrated himself, sniffed the ground, placed a wooden or a clay tablet with his petition on the bottom step of the stairs, where there was a heap of them already, and passed on.

Everyone was admitted into the Court, but a special permit was required for entering the passage leading to the king's tabernacle. Mahu, the chief of the guards, watched over everything.

Suddenly there was a disturbance. A petitioner tried to get through the little door. The soldiers crossed their swords in front of him but he went straight ahead, stretching his arm towards the king

and screaming as though he were being cut to pieces:

"Defend, save, have mercy, Joy of the Sun!"

Not daring to kill a man before the king, the soldiers lifted their swords and the man, flattening himself on the ground and wriggling like an eel, crept between them and began crawling up the stairs.

Mahu rushed at him and seized him by the collar, but the man wriggled out and went on screaming and crawling towards the king.

Mahu made a sign to the lancers of the bodyguard who stood two in a row, along the stairs. They closed their ranks and lowered their spears. But the man crawled on.

At the same moment a frenzied scream was heard:

"Let him through! Let him through!"

The squealing, breathless scream like that of a woman in hysterics or of a child in a fit was so strange that Dio did not recognize the king's voice. With a distorted face he jumped up and stamped with both feet, as the little girls had done when they played blind man's buff to the sound of the threshing song. And the ringing cry went on:

"Let him through! Let him through!"

Mahu made another sign to the lancers and they lifted their spears, making way. The man crawled between them and advanced almost as far as the top landing where the king's tabernacle stood. He raised his head and Dio recognised the long red curls, the red goat's beard, the prominent ears, hooked nose, thick lips and burning eyes of Issachar, son of Hamuel.

The king was quiet now and, bending forward, looked straight into Issachar's eyes intently and, as it were, greedily, just as Issachar looked at him.

"Your servant has a secret message for you, sire!" Issachar whispered.

"Speak, I listen."

"No, for you, for you alone."

"Leave us alone," the king said to the dignitaries who stood on the landing.

All withdrew except Dio who hid behind the corner of the tabernacle.

Some three or four steps separated Issachar from the king. "I know who you are! I know!" he said, crawling up and looking straight into the king's eyes, with the same intent, eager look. "Sun's joy, Sun's Only Son, Akhnaton Uaenra, Son of the living God!"

Suddenly he jumped up and drew a knife from his belt. But before he had time to raise it Dio darted forward and seized him by the hand. He pushed her so that she fell on her knees but jumped up again, not letting go of his hand, and screening the king with her body. An unendurably burning chill pierced her shoulder. She heard shouts, saw people running and fell on the ground with the last thought: 'he will kill him!'

IX

ARADISE gardens of Maru-Aton—the Precincts of the Sun—were situated south of the city, where the rocks of the hilly desert were close to the river.

The sweet breath of the north wind could be felt even on the hottest days under the shade of the evergreen palms and cedars laden with the fragrance of incense. Each tree was planted in a hole dug in the sand, filled with the Nile black earth and surrounded by a ridge of bricks to prevent water running away.

Everywhere there were flower-beds, ponds, islands, bridges, arbours, chapels, summer houses of light transparent lattice-work magnificently painted and gilded like jewel boxes.

The king often came here to rest from the noise of the city in the stillness of paradise.

Dio spent three months here recovering from her wound. Issachar hit her with the knife just above her left breast. It was a dangerous wound: had the knife gone in deeper it would have touched the heart. During the first few days she suffered from fever and delirium.

She fancied she was lying on the funeral pyre as then, in the island of Crete after killing the god

Bull; the sacrificial knife pierced her heart; the flames burnt her but through their heat she felt a heavenly freshness: Merira was the flame and Tammuzadad—the freshness.

Or she saw a fiery red goat grazing on the green meadows of paradise; the grass turned coal-black at his touch and red sparks flitted about it; and again—Tamu was the green grass and Merira—the sparks.

Or it was a rich old Sidonian merchant unfolding before her among the booths of the Knossos harbour magnificent stuff, red shot with green; winking slyly he praised his goods: "a true robe of Baal! A mine of silver per cubit is my last price." And, once more, the red shade was Merira, the green—Tammuzadad.

Or, the real Merira was taking her into the holy of holies of Aton's temple, as he really had done, three days before Issachar's attack on the king; she did not want to go in, knowing that no one but the king and the high priest were supposed to do so, but Merira reassured her, saying, "Yes, with me you may!" And, taking her by the hand, he led her in. In the dim light of sanctuary lamps the bas-relief of the Sphinx seemed a pale phantom: a lion's body and legs, human arms and head and an inexpressibly strange, fine, birdlike face—old, ancient, eternal. "If a man had suffered for a thousand years in hell and then came to earth again, he would have a face like that," Merira whispered in her ear. "Who is he?" she tried to recognize him and could not; and then, suddenly, she knew him and woke up with a cry of unearthly horror: 'Akhnaton'!

The king's physician, Pentu, treated her so cleverly that she was soon better. But the unwearying care of the queen did her more good perhaps than any medicine. The queen nursed Dio as though she had been her own daughter; she never left her, spent sleepless nights beside her though she herself was far from well: she had a cough and every evening there was an ominous red flush in her cheeks.

Each time that Dio saw the wan, beautiful face bending over her, the face of one who had also received a mortal wound, she felt like bursting into tears.

She learned from the queen what happened in the Beggars Court after Issachar had struck her and she fell down senseless.

"God has saved the king by a miracle!" everyone said. The assassin had raised his knife to strike him when some dreadful vision appeared before him; the knife dropped out of his hand and he fell at the king's feet. The king, thinking that Dio was killed, bent over her and embraced her with a cry so terrible that only then they understood how much he loved her. He would not leave her, but at last Pentu, the physician, assured him that Dio was alive and he got up, covered with her blood.

"You are now related by blood both to him and to me," the queen said, smiling through tears.

Some of the bodyguards rushed at Issachar, intending to kill him on the spot, but the others saved him at the orders of Mahu and Ramose; only these two had kept their presence of mind amidst the general confusion and remembered that, before

putting the criminal to death, they ought to find out from him whether he had any accomplices. Issachar was taken to the prison and cross-examined, but he said very little; he did not give anyone away and only confessed that when he raised the knife to strike the king he had a vision. He would not say what the vision was and only muttered to himself something in the Jewish language about their King-Messiah and repeated senseless words "they shall look on Him whom they pierced." But he would not explain who was pierced and then grew silent altogether.

Torture was forbidden by royal decree in the holy province of Aton, yet considering the importance of the occasion they had recourse to it all the same. But neither antelope lashes nor hippopotamus scourges could untie Issachar's tongue. Mahu and Ramose had to give him up at last.

On that same night he was taken ill with something like brain fever—or pretended to be. Fearing that the criminal might die before the execution Ramose hastened to ask the king for a death penalty had been abolished in Aton's province. And when Ramose suggested that the criminal should be moved to some other province and executed there, the king smiled and said, shrugging his shoulders: "there is no deceiving God, my friend! This man wanted to kill me here—and here he must be judged."—"Not judged, but pardoned," Ramose understood and was indignant; he decided to put Issachar to death secretly by the hands of the gaolers. But he did not succeed in this either: the old gaolers

were replaced by the new who had received strict orders to preserve the prisoner's life.

Issachar soon recovered from his real, or pretended, illness. The king who had had an epileptic fit after Issachar's attack on him and was still far from well, visited the prisoner and had a long peaceful talk almost alone with him: the guards stood at a distance; and a few days later it appeared that the prisoner had escaped.

The three elder princesses, Maki, Rita and Ankhi, helped the queen to nurse Dio; it was from them she heard of the city rumour about the king having himself helped Issachar to escape; it was said that the man had not gone far but was hiding somewhere in the town waiting, perhaps, for a new opportunity to take the king's life.

"The king has now shamed the faces of all his faithful servants because he loves those who hate him and hates those who love him!" Ramose cried when he heard of Issachar's escape, and he recalled the words of old Amenhotep the Wise, the tutor and namesake of the king's father: "if you want to please the gods, sire, and to cleanse Egypt from corruption, drive away all the Jews!"

"The darling Hippopotamus is right," Ankhi concluded—she called Ramose 'hippopotamus' because of his being so stout—and suddenly she clenched her fists and stamped almost crying with anger. "Shame, shame upon all of us that the vile Jew has been spared!"

Dio made no answer, but the thought flashed through her mind "we are related by blood now,

but blood, both his own and other people's is like water to him!" And though she immediately felt ashamed of this thought a trace of it remained in her mind.

The king often came to Maru-Aton, but the queen seldom allowed him to see Dio, especially during the first, difficult days: she knew he was not clever with the sick. His conversations with Dio were strangely trivial.

"Why is it I keep talking of trifles?" he wondered one day, left alone with her. "Is it that I am growing stupid? You know, Dio, sometimes I am awfully stupid, ridiculously so. It must be because of my illness. . . ."

He paused and then added, with the childishly timid, apologetic smile that always wrung her heart: "The worst of it is that I sometimes make the most sacred things foolish and ridiculous: like a thief stealing and desecrating that which is holy. . . ."

"Why do you talk like this?" Dio cried, indignantly.

"There, forgive me, I won't. . . . What is it I was going to say? Oh, yes, about Issachar. It wasn't out of foolishness I pardoned him. He is a very good man. . . ."

The queen came in and the conversation dropped. Dio was glad: her heart was throbbing as though Issachar's knife had once more been thrust into the wound.

By the month of Paonzu, March-April, she was almost well though still weak.

The first time she went into the garden she was surprised to see that the hot summer came straight after the winter: there was no trace of spring.

Strange longing came upon her during those hot days of delusive southern spring. "He who drinks water out of the Nile forgets his native land," the Egyptians said. She fancied she, too, had forgotten it. What was this longing then? "It's nothing," she tried to comfort herself, "it's simply foolishness, the result of illness, as with the king. It will pass off." But it did not.

In the gardens of Maru-Aton by the big pond opposite the women's quarters where Dio lived, a rare tree, hardly ever seen in Egypt, was planted—a silver birch, graceful and slender, like a girl of thirteen. It had been brought as a present to Princess Makitatona from Thracia, the land of Midnight. The princess was very fond of it; she looked after it herself, watered it and kept the ground around it well dug, covering it with fresh Nile black earth.

Dio, too, grew fond of the birch tree. Every day she watched its buds swell and sticky, greenish yellow leaves, crumpled like the face of a new-born baby, open out; she kissed them and, sniffing them with her eyes closed, fancied that every moment she would hear the call of the cuckoo and smell the melting snow and lilies of the valley as in her native woods at home on Mount Ida—smell the real spring of her own native land.

When flocks of cranes flew northwards, with their melancholy call, she stretched out her arms to them: would that she, too, were flying with them! Look-

ing at the ever blue, lifeless sky she longed for the living clouds she knew so well. Putting her ear to a shell, she eagerly listened to its roar, that was like the roar of sea waves; she dreamt of the sea in her sleep and wept. One day she sniffed a new sponge Zenra had just bought and almost cried in reality.

She had a Cretan amethyst, a present from her mother, with a fine design upon it: bare willows in a flooded meadow all bent to one side by the wind, a tumble-down old fence with poles sticking out, the ripple of autumn rain on the water: everything dull and wretched and yet she would have given her very soul to see it all again. But she knew she would never see it, she would never go home—she would not want to herself. Was this, perhaps, why she longed for it so? Thus the radiant shades in paradise may be longing for this gloomy earth.

One early morning she sat by Maki's birch tree, listening to the wailing of the shepherd's pipe in the hills above Maru-Aton. She knew both the song and the singer: the song was about the dead god Tammuz and the singer was Engur, son of Nurdahan, a Babylonian shepherd, an old servant of Tammuzadad, brought by her to Egypt from the island of Crete.

The sounds of the pipe fell sadly and monotonously, sound after sound like tear after tear.

"The wail is raised for Tammuz far away,
The mother-goat and the kid are slain,
The mother-sheep and the lamb are slain,
The wail is raised for the beloved Son."

Dio listened and it seemed to her that in this song the whole creation was weeping for the Son who is to come, but still tarries "how long, how long, O Lord?"

Nothing stirred and complete stillness reigned everywhere; only the air, in spite of the early hour, was simmering with heat over the sandy paths of the garden and flowing in streams like molten glass.

Suddenly a fan-like leaf at the top of a palm moved as though coming to life, then another and a third. There was a gust of wind, hot as from an oven; the sand on the paths rose up like smoke; the light grew dim; the sky turned dark and yellowish in an extraordinary, incredible way: it might be the end of the world; the whole garden rustled and groaned in the sudden whirlwind. It was dark as night.

Dio ran home. The wind almost knocked her off her feet, burned her face, blinded her with sand. Her breath failed her, her temples throbbed, her legs gave way under her. It was not twenty paces to the house but she felt she would fall exhausted before she got there.

"Make haste, make haste, dear!" Zenra shouted to her from the steps; seizing Dio by the hand she dragged her into the entry, and with difficulty shutting the door in the tearing wind, bolted it fast.

"What is it, nurse?" Dio asked.

"Sheheb, a plague of Set," the old woman answered in a whisper, putting the palms of both hands to her forehead as in prayer.

Sheheb, the south-east wind, blows from the

Arabian desert. Fiery clouds of sand, thrown up by the whirlwind, fall slanting upon the ground with the noise of hail. The sun turns crimson, then dark like an ember. At midday lamps have to be lit. Neither men nor animals can breathe in the black stuffy darkness; plants perish. The whirlwind never lasts more than an hour; if it lasted longer everything would be burned up as with fire.

In the fiery darkness of the Sheheb Dio lay on her couch like one dead. The wind howled outside and the whole house shook as though it would fall. Someone seemed to be knocking and throwing handfuls of sand at the closed shutters, the flame of the lamp flickered in the wind that penetrated through the walls.

The door opened suddenly and someone came in.

"Zenra, is it you?" Dio called.

There was no answer. Somebody approached the couch. Dio recognized Tammuzadad and was not frightened or surprised, she seemed to have expected him. He bent over her and smiled; no, it was not Tamu, but Merira. She looked closely and again it was Tamu and then Merira again; first it was one then another; they interchanged and merged into one another like the two colours of a shot material. He bent down still lower, looked into her eyes as though asking a question. She knew that if she answered 'no' with her eyes only he would go away; but she closed her eyes without speaking. He lay down beside her and embraced her. She lay like one dead.

When he had gone away she thought "I will go and hang myself." But she went on lying quite

still. She may have dropped asleep and by the time she woke up the Sheheb was over, the sky was clear and the flame of the lamp looked pale. Zenra came in and Dio understood that it had been delirium.

After the Sheheb the weather freshened. The sweet breath of the north wind could be felt in the shade of the evergreen palms and cedars fragrant like a censer of incense. Only at times a smell of carrion came from the direction of Sheol and then Dio thought of her Sheheb nightmare. It was the last attack of her illness. The wound healed so completely that the only trace left of it was a pale pink scar on the dark skin, and Dio was quite well.

The king had once given her a beautiful scroll of papyrus, yellowish like old ivory, smoothed to perfection with wild boar's tooth, fine, strong, imperishable.

Papyrus was expensive and only used for the most important records; everything else was written on clay or wooden tablets, flat white stones or fragments of broken earthenware.

Dio had been wondering for some time what would be good enough to write on this scroll; at last she thought of something.

All the king's teaching was given by word of mouth; he never wrote down anything himself and did not allow others to do so. "To write," he used to say, "is to kill the word."

"It will all be lost, it will vanish like a footprint on the sand," Dio often thought sorrowfully, and at last she decided: "I will write down on the papyrus the king's teaching; I will not disobey him: no one living now shall see the scroll; but when I

have finished writing I will bury it in the ground; perhaps in ages to come men will discover it and read it."

She carried out her plan.

In secret from all she worked night after night, sitting on the floor in front of a low desk with a sloping board for the papyrus, tracing upon it, with the sharpened end of a reed, close columns of hieroglyphics, abbrevated into shorthand, and covering each column with cedar varnish which made the writing indelible.

Words of wisdom of King Akhnaton Uaenra Neferheperura —Sun's joy, Sun's beautiful essence, Sun's only Son—heard and written down by Dio, daughter of Aridoel, a Cretan, priestess of the Great Mother.

The King says:

"Aton, the face of god, the disc of the sun, is the visible image of the invisible God. To reveal to men the hidden one is everything.

"My grandfather, Prince Tutmose, was hunting once in the desert of the Pyramids; he was tired, lay down and dropped asleep at the foot of the great Sphinx which, in those days, was buried in the sands. The Sphinx appeared to him in a dream and said "I am your father, Aton; I will make you king if you dig me out of the sands." The prince did so, and I am doing so, too: I dig the living God out of the dead sands—dead hearts."

The King says:

"There are three substances in God: Zatut—Rays, Neferu—Beauty,—Merita—Love; the Disc of the Sun, Light and Warmth; Father, Son, Mother."

"The symbol of Aton, the disc of the sun with three rays like hands, stretched downwards is clear to all men—to the wise and to the children."

"The remedy from death is not ointments for the dead, balsam, salt, resin or saltpetre, but mercy and love. Have mercy upon one another, O people, have mercy upon one another and you shall never see death!"

The King said to the malefactor who attempted his life, Issachar the Israelite: "your God sacrifices all to Himself and mine sacrifices Himself for all."

The King says:

"The way they break granite in the quarries of Egypt is

this: they make a hole in the stone, drive a wooden wedge into it, moisten it with water and the wood, as it swells out, breaks the stone. I, too, am such a wedge."

"The Egyptians have an image of Osiris-Set, god-devil, with two heads on one body, as it were, twins grown together. I want to cut them in two."

"The deadness of Egypt is the perfect equilibrium of the scales. I want to disturb it."

"How little I have done! I have lifted the coffin-lid over Egypt and I know, when I am gone, the lid will be shut down again. But the signal has been given to future ages!"

"When I was about eight I saw one day the soldiers piling up before the King, my father, the cut-off hands of enemies killed in battle, and I fainted with the smell of corruption. When I think of war I always recall this smell."

"On the wall of the Charuk palace, near Thebes, where I spent my childhood, there was a mural painting of a naval battle between the Cretans and the Egyptians; the enemies' ships were going down, the men drowning and the Egyptians were stretching out to them poles, sticks, oars, saving their enemies. I remember someone laughed looking at the painting: 'One wouldn't find such fools anywhere except in Egypt!' I did not know what to answer and perhaps I do not know now, but I am glad to be living in the land of such fools!"

"The greatest of the kings of Egypt, Amenemhet, had it written on his tomb:

> In my reign men lived in peace and mercy
> Arrows and swords lay idle in my reign."

"The god rejoices when he goes into battle and sees blood" is said in the inscription of King Tutmose the Third, the Conqueror, to the god Amon. Amon is the god of war, Aton the god of peace. One must choose between them. I have chosen."

"There will be war so long as there are many peoples and many gods; but when there is one God and one mankind, there will be peace."

"We Egyptians despise the Jews, but maybe they know more about the Son than we do: we say about Him 'He was' and they say He is to come.'"

The king said to me alone and told me not to repeat it to anyone:

"I am the joy of the Sun, Akhnaton? No, not joy as yet, but sorrow; not the light, but the shadow of the sun that is to rise—the Son!"

Dio wrote down many other words of the king in her scroll and she finished with the hymn to Aton:

The Song of King Akhnaton Uaenra Neferheperura to Aton, the living and only God.

If my scroll is ever found by you, men of the ages to come, pray for me in gratitude for having preserved this song for you, the sweetest of all the songs of the Lord, that at the everlasting supper I may eat bread with my beloved King Akhnaton, the messenger of the rising sun—the Son.

Glorious is thy rising in the east
Lord and giver of life, Aton!
When thou risest in the sky
Thou fillest the earth with thy beauty.
Thy rays embrace all created things,
Thou hast carried them all away captive.
Thou bindest them by thy love.
Thou art far but thy rays are on earth,
Thou art on high, thy footprints are the day.
When thou settest in the west
Men lie in the darkness like the dead.
Their heads are wrapped up, their nostrils stopped
Stolen are all their things that are under their heads
While they know it not.
Lions come forth from their dens,
Serpents creep from out their holes:
The Creator has gone to rest and the world is dumb.

Thou risest and bright is the earth
Thou sendest forth thy rays and the darkness flees.
Men rise, bathe their limbs, take their clothing,
Their arms are uplifted in prayer.
And in all the world they do their work.

All cattle graze in pastures green,
All plants are growing in the fields,
The birds are flying over their nests,
And lift their wings like hands in prayer.
Lambs leap and dance upon their feet,
All winged things fly gaily round.
They all live in thy life, O Lord!

The boats sail up and down the river,
Every highway is open because thou hast dawned.
The fish in the river leap up before thee
And thy rays are in the midst of the great sea.

Thou createst the man-child in woman,
And makest the seed in man,
Givest life to the child in its mother's womb,
Soothing it that it may not weep
Ere its own mother can soothe it.

When the chicken cries in the egg-shell,
Thou givest it breath to preserve it alive
And the strength to break the shell.
It comes forth from the egg and staggers,
But with its voice it calls to thee.
How manifold are thy works, O Lord!
They are hidden from us, Thou only God whose power no other possesses!
Thou didst create the earth according to thy desire,
While thou wast alone in eternity,
Thou didst create man and the beasts of the field,
All the creatures that are upon the earth,
And fly with their wings on high.

Thou didst create Syria, Nubia and Egypt,
Setting every man in his place.
Giving him all that he needs,
His measure of food and his measure of days.
Their tongues are diverse in speech,
Their forms are diverse and their skins,
For Thou, divider, hast divided the peoples.

Thou makest the Nile in the nether world
To fill with goods thy people here;
Thou hast set a Nile up in the sky,
That its waters may fall down in floods,
Giving drink to wild beasts on the hills,
And refreshing the fields and the meadows.
How excellent are thy works, O Lord!
The Nile in heaven is for the strangers,
And the Nile from the nether world is for Egypt.

Thou feedest each plant as thine own child,
Thou makest the seasons for all thy creatures:
The winter to bring them coolness
And the summer to bring them heat.

Thou didst create the distant heavens
In order to behold all that Thou didst make.
Thou comest, thou goest, thou comest back
And createst out of thyself, the Only One,
Thousands upon thousands of forms:
Cities, towns and villages
On highways and on rivers.
All eyes see thy eternal sun.
When thou hast risen they live, when thou settest they die,
When thou didst establish the earth
Thou didst reveal thy will to me,
Thy Son, Akhnaton, who lives for ever and proceeds from thee,
And to thy beloved daughter,

Nefertiti, the delight of the Sun's delights.
Who flourishes for ever and ever.
Thou, Father, art in my heart
And there's no other that knows thee,
Only I know thee, thy son,
Akhnaton Uaenra,
Joy of the Sun, Sun's only son!"

When she had finished writing, Dio put the scroll inside an earthenware vessel, sealed it with a leaden seal with the sun disc of Aton and, as soon as it was dark, took a spade and went to Maki's birch tree by the big pond in the garden.

The fiery whirlwind of Sheheb had withered the tree, the blackened leaves were rolled up into little tubes, but the roots were alive. Maki dug it out to move it to a new hole with fresh earth in it, but she probably had not had time to finish her work before night: the tree lay near the hole.

Dio dug the hole deeper, put the earthenware pot into it, covered it with earth and levelled it.

A white rose was blooming close by in a flower-bed by the pond. In the stillness of the April night glowworms flitted about like sparks. One of them burrowed its way into the rose, and the flower seemed to have a heart of fire.

Dio went up to it, kissed it and thought:

"If some day men read my writing, they will connect Akhnaton with Dio. I shall be in him as this flame is in the flower."

X

THE whip cracked, the horses dashed forward, the feathers on their manes swayed, snowflakes of foam dropped off their bridles, and the chariot flew like a whirlwind. The air whistled in the ears; the lion's tail fixed to the king's belt at the back and the crimson ribbons of his robe fluttered in the wind. The king was driving; Dio stood behind him.

They passed the palm groves and the fields of ripe, yellow corn, taller than the height of man; the Nile glittered for the last time in the distance and the menacing silence of the endless desert, now dark brown, now sparkling like glass, enveloped them.

As she looked through her lashes at the shining snake-like sandy roads, flattened by heavy traffic, Dio recalled the thin layer of ice over the thawing snow sparkling in the sun on Mount Dicte. The dazzling air was shimmering with the heat. A vulture hung motionless in the dark blue sky. At times the shadow of a passing cloud ran over the ground and, still quicker, an antelope galloped past; suddenly it would stop and, stretching out its neck, sniff the air and then run on, light as the wind.

The sun was setting when the wayfarers saw on a high rock of the Arabian hills a boundary-stone of the province of Aton.

The images of King Akhnaton and Queen Nefertiti, cut out in the rock at a height where only the wind, the sun and the eagles could reach them, were half-covered, as though buried alive, by the waves of drifting sands. The only way to reach the bas-reliefs was to descend by a rope down a perpendicular rock; and evidently this was what some enemy of Aton's faith had done, for the images were broken and defiled.

The king stepped out of the chariot. The long black shadow cast by his figure upon the white sand seemed to stretch to the ends of the earth.

There was a clatter of hoofs. The high-priest, Merira, and the chief of the guards, Mahu, drove up.

"If I could only find the scoundrels, I would kill them on the spot!" Mahu cried indignantly, when he saw the desecrated images.

"Come, come, my friend," said the king, with a smile. "The sands will bury them anyway—there will be nothing left."

Mahu went to make arrangements for the night: the king wished to sleep in the desert.

Close by there was a mountain gorge, dark and narrow like a coffin, where tombs had been cut in the rock for the princesses. Hard by an old fig-tree made an unfading patch of green against the dead sand, and a sweetbrier flowered, fragrant with the scent of honey and roses: the secret water of an underground spring kept them fresh.

The king, accompanied by Dio and Merira, went down into the gorge to see the tombs.

When they had finished they walked up the slope of the hill by a narrow jackals' path, talking.

"Is the decree concerning the gods ready, Merira?" the king asked.

Dio understood that he meant the decree prohibiting the worship of all the old gods.

"It is ready," Merira answered, "but do think before you proclaim it, sire."

"Think of what?"

"Of not losing your kingdom."

The king looked at him intently, without speaking, and then asked again:

"And what ought I to do, my friend, not to lose my kingdom?"

"I have told you many times, Uaenra: be merciful to yourself and others."

"To myself and others? Can one do both?"

"Yes."

"And what do you think, Dio?"

"I think one cannot."

Merira looked at her from under his brows, with mute derision.

"Do you remember, Merira, who it was said: 'I know the day when I shall not be'?" the king asked.

"I remember: the god Osiris."

"No, the man Osiris. It is the will of the Father that the Son should suffer and die for all. Blessed be my heavenly Father! I, too, know the day when I shall not be. It is drawing near—it has come already. Now my kingdom is coming to an end, now fulfil the last will of your king, Merira, son of Nehtaneb, and proclaim to men my decree concerning the false gods and the one true God, whose is the glory for ever and ever!"

"Your will shall be done, sire, but remember: once the fire is kindled, there is no putting it out."

"Why, did you think we should just play with the fire and then let it out?" the king said, with a smile. He put both his hands on Merira's shoulders and again looked deep into his eyes.

"I know what makes you wretched, Merira," he said quietly, almost in a whisper. "You have not yet decided whether you are my friend or my enemy. Maybe you will decide very soon. Remember one thing: I love you. Don't be afraid then, my friend, my beloved enemy; be my friend or my enemy to the bitter end. God help you!"

He put his arms round him and kissed him.

The chariot was brought. The king stepped into it and Dio followed him. The whip cracked, the horses dashed off and the chariot flew like the whirlwind.

Merira watched it go, and when it disappeared in the last rays of the setting sun he stretched out his arms towards it and cried:

"You have prophesied your own doom, Akhnaton Uaenra: now your sun is setting, now your kingdom is coming to an end!"

It was already dark when, having driven far into the hilly desert, the king stopped and alighted from the chariot. Dio tied the horses to a spear stuck in the sand. The king sat down on a stone and Dio sat at his feet.

He pointed out to her the distant flame of a bonfire in the desert.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Mahu, strange man that he is. . . ." the king

answered. "He follows me about like a watchdog; I suppose he is afraid of my running away. . . ."

Both were silent: Dio was waiting for him to speak: she knew he had come with her to the desert in order to talk undisturbed.

"I want to ask you something, Dio, and I cannot, I can't find the words," he began quietly, without looking at her.

He broke off and then began lower still:

"Do you know what Iserker said to me when I asked him why he wanted to kill me? 'Because, being a man, you make yourself God'. This was well said, wasn't it?"

"No, it wasn't: you don't make yourself God."

"I know I don't: it would be better for a man who made himself God not to have been born. But that's one thing and then there is something else; and one thing is so like the other that sometimes there is no distinguishing them. . . . And then it turns round all of a sudden: it was like this and then, all at once, it's the other way about. . . ."

He rambled on incoherently, constantly losing the thread of his thought, wandering off the point and trying to find words; at last he was in a complete tangle and, with a wave of his hand, said hopelessly:

"No, I cannot! I will tell you another time. . . ."

Dio smiled, and, taking his hand began kissing and stroking it gently, comforting him like a child.

"Better tell me now, Enra!"

'Enra' was the diminutive of 'Uaenra' and only those most intimate with him called him so.

"You speak very well, I understand it all. You don't make yourself a god, that's one thing, and

what was the other?" she tried to help him as though he were a schoolboy who had forgotten his lesson.

"What was the other thing?" he began again and suddenly hurried on joyfully. "Do you remember the prayer 'Thou, Father art in my heart and no one knows Thee but me, Thy son?'" I have said this and I don't go back on it. I never shall. This is as fixed in me as the stars in heaven. But this is so when I am not afraid, and when I am afraid, I pray to the Father: 'send someone else, someone else instead, I cannot!' And now, too, I am afraid. I keep thinking of the burden I have taken upon myself. Can a man bear it? What do you think, can he?"

"I don't know, Enra. . . ."

"Don't you know either?"

The way he looked at her wrung her heart.

She clasped his knees and cried: "Yes, I do know: you can—you alone!"

He said nothing and buried his face in his hands. There was a long silence.

The stars came out. The Milky Way like a cloud rent in two stretched from one end of the desert to the other; the Pleiades glowed and the seven stars of Tuart, the Hippopotamus, glittered with a cold brilliance.

The king uncovered his face and looked at Dio. His face was as still as the sleeping desert and the starry heavens above. But Dio shuddered: she recalled the Sphinx with the face of Akhnaton; if a man had been tortured for a thousand years in hell and then came to earth again, he would have such a face.

"Dio, my sister, my beloved, why did you come to me, why did you love me?" he said, wringing his hands. "It was easier for me without you: I did not know myself then, did not see myself. For the first time I saw myself in you and was terrified: who am I? who am I? Go away, I beg you! Why should you be tortured with me?"

"No, my brother, I shall never go away from you, I want to suffer with you!"

"You have escaped one fire and now you seek another?"

"Yes, I want to perish in your fire!"

PART THREE

I AM NOT HE

I

HE days of the floods were approaching.

The black, parched, withered earth, deathlike and terrible was aching under the terrible sun; the waters of the Nile barely covered its slimy bed. Men, animals, and plants were perishing with the heat. Had the heat lasted, everything, it seemed, would have been burnt up as with the fire of a conflagration or of the Sheheb.

But at the exact day, at the exact hour, God's miracle took place: Mother Isis wept over her dead son—the dried-up Nile; her tear—the star Sirius, the forerunner of the sun—fell into it and the ram-headed Khnum unsealed the springs of water.

Frogs croaked joyfully; herons paced about the black mud as though measuring the earth like the wise god Tot, the Measurer; the clerks of the Water Department measured the height of the water from the Waterfalls to the Delta by the marks on the stone walls of the measuring wells, while simple folk did it by the crocodile eggs and ant-heaps: the water never rose above these. Twelve cubits meant the ruin, sixteen cubits the salvation of Egypt.

At that time Merira went to Nut-Amon, Thebes, to see Ptamose who was at death's door and implored

him not to delay. But even when Merira had arrived in Thebes he kept putting off the meeting, as though he feared it.

He, too, was ill; he could not sleep at night and in the daytime he wandered about the town, not knowing what to do with himself. A grimace of disgust was constantly upon his face as though he smelt an evil stench. This was one of the curious torments of his illness: he was everywhere pursued by bad smells—of dead rats as in a granary, of bats as in the burials caves, or of rotten fish as on the banks of the Nile where fish is cleaned, salted and dried in the sun. No perfumes were of any use: they only made the stench worse.

Some three days after his arrival he was sitting by the eastern gates of the Apet-Oisit enclosure, among the ruins of the tomb-sanctuary of King Tutmose the Third.

The sun was in the zenith: its rays came down straight almost without casting any shadow. The dreadful light poured down like molten tin. Merira sat in the narrow shadow cast by the crown of the giant pillar that had fallen—the double head of the Heifer-Hather. The shadow at his feet diminished so rapidly that one could almost see it: only a minute before he had been all in the shadow and now the sun was burning his feet. He saw a scorpion running in the dusty grass but he did not stir, he seemed spellbound. There was a dull pain in his left temple, as though a fishbone had pierced the eyeball. He felt rather sick, and there was a taste of death in his mouth.

Black dots like flies, swam about in the air, that quivered with the heat, and turning into transparent glassy maggots melted away. One of them began to grow and became an ancient Sphinx, with the face of Akhnaton; if a man had suffered for a thousand years in hell and then came to earth again he would have a face like that. He slowly swam past and melted away, then came back again, turned thick and heavy and stood on all fours; his hind legs were those of a lion but the front were human arms. He ran along making a hideous clatter with his claws.

As though breaking with a terrible effort invisible bonds on his arms and legs, Merira regained consciousness, got up and walked away.

By the same subterranean passages which Dio had trodden, he descended into the large, low-pitched sepulchral chamber, or sanctuary, supported by low quadrangular columns. A couch stood in the middle; a corpse lay upon it.

The vaulted niche in the wall where once Amon's great Ram had lain on a couch of purple in the brilliant light of sanctuary lamps, was dark and empty: the animal had just died and its body was being embalmed.

Merira told the two priests who were in the room to go out, and, approaching the couch with the dead man upon it, knelt down, bending towards him. The dead man opened his young, living, immortal eyes; his lips whispered with the rustle of dry leaves:

"Is it you, Merira?"

"Yes."

"Blessed be the True, the Only God! I have waited seven years for you, my son, I knew that you would come—that I would not die without seeing you. Why did you tarry so long ? Did you think I would not forgive you? I will forgive everything. Well, tell me, are you with him or with me?"

"Oh, if I only knew, if I only knew, father! This is why I have suffered so for seven years—because I don't know on whose side I am. Perhaps I am neither with you nor with him."

"There is no middle course."

"To an honest man there is not, but to a vile one anything is possible. For seven years I have done nothing but deceive myself and others. Don't torment me, father, don't ask me, decide yourself on whose side I am!"

"If I do you will not believe me. Do you remember your oath?"

"What are oaths to me? I have broken them long ago."

"No, you wanted to break them but you could not. You know yourself, there is no room for both of you in the world, it is either you or he. If you don't kill him, you will kill yourself."

"Yes, perhaps I will. Or, first him and then myself. . . . Can one kill the man one loves, father?"

"Yes. To kill the body in order to save the soul."

"Well, that is how it will be with me, or perhaps it will be different: I will kill him not out of love but out of envy. A beggar envies a rich man, a scoundrel envies a noble one, the dead envy the living. Set killed Osiris, his brother, from envy. And how can I help envying him? He is—and I

am not: he is alive and I am dead. He kills me, he destroys me for ever and ever!"

"Why have you not come before? What have you been doing with him?"

"What have I been doing? I thought I should get the better of him, deceive him, catch him in my net, but instead . . . ."

He broke off and asked, with a wry smile:

"Was it good, father, that Set killed Osiris?"

"Why do you ask? You know yourself: they, the blind puppies, think it was not good. Osiris is life and Set is death for men, but for us, the wise ones, this is not so. The Tormented one torments, the Slain one slays, the Destroyed one destroys the world. Osiris-Amenti is the eternal West, the sun of the dead, the end of the world: he will rise over the world and the sun of the living will be extinguished; the god with an unbeating heart will conquer the world and the heart of the world will cease to beat. He is merciful and he ensnares the world with his mercy as a bird-catcher ensnares a bird. He says 'everlasting life' and, behold, there is everlasting death. Set and Osiris have been struggling since the beginning of the world, but the world does not yet know which of the two shall conquer."

"You speak almost exactly as he does, father! the tiniest hairbreadth divides you from him. . . ."

"Yes, there is only a hairbreadth difference between truth and falsehood. Do you know the secret? The first Osiris has been, the second is to come; this man is but a shadow cast by Him; this one has spoken but the One to come will act."

"What will He do?"

"Destroy the world."

"Or perhaps the world will perish for His sake and be happy in doing so?"

"And will you be happy, too?"

"Perhaps I, also."

"Do you love Him, then?"

"I do. How can one help loving Him? He is more beautiful than all the sons of man. The devil knew well how to tempt man. I love His shadow, too, King Akhnaton; I love and hate him at the same time. And he knows it—he knows I want to kill him. . . ."

Without speaking Ptamose took a ring off his finger and put it on Merira's.

King Tutmose the Third, King Akhnaton's great-great-grandfather, gave this ring to Hatuseneb, the high priest of Amon. A tiny cup of poison was concealed under the fiery yellow carbuncle—'Amon's eye.' On his deathbed the king commanded that if any king of Egypt were false to Amon he was to be killed with that poison.

"My spirit be upon you, my son, and the Spirit of the Secret One!" Ptamose said, laying his hands on Merira's head. "Henceforth, you, Merira, son of Nehtaneb, are the High Priest of Amon. Woe to thy enemies, O Lord! Their dwelling-place is in darkness but the rest of the earth in thy light: the sun of them that hate thee is darkened, the sun of them that love thee is rising!"

He ceased speaking, closed his eyes, and for a few minutes lay without moving. Suddenly a faint tremor passed over his body. He heaved a deep, deep sigh;

his chest rose, then sank and did not rise again. But there was no change in his face.

Merira watched him for some time, unable to tell whether he were alive or dead. He took his hand—it was cold; he felt his heart—it did not beat.

He called the priests and said:

"The great seer—Urma, the prophet of all the gods of the south and the north, the high priest of Amon, Ptamose, has ascended to the gods!"

II

ow we have begun, we must finish; it is no use crying over sour milk, as an intelligent girl said once, having done something that could not be put right," said Ay, a court dignitary, and everyone laughed.

"How soon will the decree for destroying the gods be published?" Tuta asked.

"In ten days or so," Parennofer, the Keeper of the King's Seal, replied.

"Couldn't we hurry it? It will be the beginning, you know. . . ." Tuta said.

"It may be the beginning of such things that nothing will be left of us," muttered Ahmes, the superintendent of the king's household.

"What is it you are afraid of?" Tuta asked.

"Oh, anything! It's no joke going against the gods . . . ."

"Well, the gods can fend for themselves, but we must think of our own skins. In this accursed hole, Aton's province, we are like mice in a trap—there is no way of escape. They will slaughter us like sheep when the levelling begins."

"What levelling?"

"Don't you know? The king thinks of nothing but making the rich and the poor equal. But what if the mob does rise up in earnest?"

"No, I am not particularly afraid of the mob," Ahmes replied. "The mob may very likely be on our side, but our own sort, the officials, will cut off our noses in a trice."

"'Better have a head without a nose than a nose without a head,' as a smart fellow said who had had his nose cut off," Ay said, and everyone laughed again.

"And what are we to do with Saakera?" Parennofer asked.

"Nothing at all; his Ethiopian woman will deal with him," Ay answered.

Saakera, the heir-apparent, had three hundred and sixty-five wives, according to the number of days in the year, one more beautiful than the other, but he was said to prefer to them all an old, hideous and bad-tempered Ethiopian who, so the rumour ran, used to box his ears and do what she liked with him.

"One can't trust anyone," Ahmes concluded, looking round at them all suspiciously. "Do you remember the words of King Amenemhet? 'Do not trust your brother, do not commune with your friend, for in the day of fear no one will stand by you. I gave alms to the poor and bread to the hungry; but he who ate my bread lifted his heel against me.' And someone else, too, has said rather cleverly 'where there are six conspirators, there is one traitor.'"

They all looked at one another in silence: there were more than six of them.

They were on the top floor of Tuta's summer-house, which had just been built but was not yet inhabited; no one could disturb them there: the

garden surrounding it was under water during the flooding of the Nile, so that the house had to be approached by boat.

On meeting each guest, Tuta led him to the washing-stand, then showed him to a seat on the wide and low couch that ran the whole length of the room and was covered with carpets, offered him the fragrant cup for the head and moved towards him the stand with cooling drinks in Tintyrian vessels of porous clay.

The night was dark and hot, a hot wind smelling of water, river mud and fish, blew in sudden gusts; it set up its mournful song, that sounded like a wolf's howl or a child's cry, somewhere very far-off —at the end of the world, it seemed—then drew nearer and nearer and suddenly came in a fearful gust, whistling, squealing, roaring and moaning furiously, and stopped as suddenly; all that could be heard was the splash of water against the walls of the house and the rustle of palm leaves like a whisper behind the windows.

During one of these quiet intervals the door opened noiselessly and a huge black cat, half-panther, walked in like a shadow. Going up to Tuta it began rubbing itself against his legs, purring loudly. He got up to shut the door when Merira came in.

Tuta ran forward to meet him and was going to bow down to the ground before the high priest of Amon; but Merira embraced him and kissed him on the mouth. Tuta offered him the seat of honour, but Merira sat down on the floor beside him, slowly looked at them all and said, with a quiet smile:

"Go on, gentlemen, I listen."

"It is for you to speak, father; it shall be as you say," Tuta replied.

"No, decide for yourselves. Do all know what we have met for?"

"Yes."

"Well, then there is nothing more to say."

"It is no use crying over sour milk," Ay repeated, adding, after a pause, "It is better that one man should die for all than that the whole people should perish."

"Who will give him the cup?" Merira asked.

"Three people can give it him in virtue of our office, you, I or Tuta," Ay answered. "Hadn't we better draw lots?"

The cat looking at the narrow stone-trellised chink-like window, right under the ceiling, was mewing savagely. Suddenly it made a huge leap across the room like a real panther, jumped up to the window, and holding on to the stone bars with its claws, thrust its head against it and tried to put its paw through, but could not: the trellis was too close. Mewing still more furiously and plaintively it jumped to the floor and rushed about the room, its black body smooth and slippery like a snake.

"What's the matter with the cat?" Merira asked. "Has it gone mad? See the way it bares its teeth! And its eyes glow like candles. Ugh, the devil! Fancy keeping a reptile like that in the house. Take care Tuta—it will go for your throat one day when you are asleep!"

"I expect it smells someone," said Ay, looking at the window.

"But who can be there? There is water all round

—no one could get through. A bird or a monkey perhaps." said Tuta.

The wind that had just been roaring stopped again suddenly and everything was so still that one could hear the water splashing against the walls of the house and the palm leaves rustling.

"Perhaps it's *they*?" Parennofer whispered, turning pale.

"Who?" Tuta asked.

"The restless. It's not for nothing they desecrate the tombs nowadays. They say there are a lot of evil spirits going about at night."

"Oh please, please don't talk about it!" Tuta implored, his stomach begining to ache with fear.

"Drive it away, I beg you," Merira cried, with disgust.

Tuta seized the cat by the collar and tried to drag it out of the room. But it would not go and he was scarcely able to master it; at last, however he succeeded, and bolted the door behind it. But the cat went on scratching and mewing outside the room.

"Let me see, what were we talking about?" Merira began again.

"About casting lots," Tuta reminded him.

"Yes. I don't know how it strikes you, gentlemen, but it seems to me that it is unworthy of intelligent men to be the slaves of chance. Let us decide freely. Ay, do you want to give the poison? No? Tuta? Nor you either? Very well, then I will."

In the depths of the room there was an altar of bronze with a folding wooden image of King Akh-

naton sacrificing to the Sun god. Merira went up to it, took the image and hit it against the corner of the bronze altar so violently that it broke in two.

"Woe to thy enemies, O Lord! Their dwelling place is in darkness and the rest of the earth in thy light; the sun of them that hate thee is darkened and the sun of them that love thee is rising. Death to Akhnaton Uaenra, the apostate!"

All repeated, joining hands over the altar:

"Death to the apostate!"

Merira led Tuta by the hand to the armchair and making him sit in it, said:

"The high priest of God on high, Amon-Ra, the king over all other gods, the prophet of all the gods of the south and the north, the great seer of the sky, Urma Ptamose, commanded me, on his death-bed, to elect king of all the earth Tutankhamon, the son of King Nebmaar Amenhotep, the son of Horus. Do you all agree, men and brethren?"

"We agree. Long live Tutankhamon, King of Egypt!"

Neferhepera, the master of the king's wardrobe, gave Merira a golden serpent of the Sun, Uta.

"By the power given me of God, I crown thee King of Egypt," Merira said, placing it on Tuta's head.

"Long live the King!" they all cried, prostrating themselves.

Merira's face was suddenly distorted.

"The cat again!" he whispered, looking into a dark corner of the room.

"The cat? Where?" Tuta asked, looking quickly about him.

"There, in the corner, do you see?"

"There is nothing there."

"No, there is not. I must have fancied it."

He moved his hand across his face and smiled.

"Zahi, Heheki—they are winged panthers, with a falcon's head, a human face on the back, a budding lotos instead of a tail and a belly covered with sharp teats like the teeth of a saw. They say there are a lot of these unclean creatures prowling about at night . . . . But perhaps they don't exist? Old women's tales . . . . Heheki, heheki," he laughed suddenly, with a laugh so dreadful that Tuta felt a shiver running down his back.

"There, there, again, look! But this time it is not a cat—it is he, Uaenra! Do you see what a face he has—worn out, old, eternal. If a man had suffered for a thousand years in hell and then came back again, he would have a face like that . . . he looks at me and laughs—he knows I want to kill him but he thinks I won't dare. . . . But wait a bit, I'll show you!"

He staggered and almost fell. They all rushed to him and would have bled him, but he had already recovered. His face was almost calm; only the corners of his mouth quivered and his lips were twisted into a smile.

All of a sudden there was a frantic squealing and howling outside the window; the leaves rustled and something fell into the water with a heavy splash.

They all ran to the ground floor hall which gave on to the garden and saw the cat floating on the water with its belly ripped open.

"It's a bad business," Ay said.

"Why?" Merira asked.

"Someone has been eavesdropping"

"What of it?"

"What of it? Why, he will tell the king."

"Let him. I know the king better than you do: he might hear with his own ears, see with his own eyes and yet not believe. He would hand the spy over to us."

"Hadn't we better put it off," Tuta began timidly; the fright had given him such a stomach-ache that he could hardly stand and could not spare a thought even for his beloved Ruru.

"Let's put it off! Let us!" everyone said.

"Cowards, scoundrels, traitors!" Merira cried in a fury. "If you put it off, I will inform against you!"

"But we are thinking of you, Merira," Ay said. "You are ill, you ought to look after yourself. . . ."

"Here is my medicine!" Merira cried, pointing to the poison ring that glittered on his finger. "It shall be as we decided: all will be over in three days' time!"

III

o not judge me, O Lord, for my many sins! I am a man with no understanding of myself," Merira whispered.

What are you whispering?" Dio asked.

"Nothing."

He stood at the prow of the boat with a double-edged harpoon in his hands and she sat at the helm, rowing with a short oar, or pushing off in shallow places with a long pole. The flat-bottomed boat for two, made of long stems of papyrus, tied together and covered with coal tar, was so unstable that one could hardly move in it without risk of upsetting it.

Merira wore the ancient hunting dress: a two-lobed apron—*shenti* of white linen, a broad necklace of turquoise and carnelian beads, a small beard of black horsehair and a 'tiled' closely curled wig; all the rest of the body was naked. In such dress the dead, after the resurrection, hunted in the blessed fields of Ialu in the papyrus thickets of the heavenly Nile.

The milky-white sky of the early morning was changing to blue, as innocent as the smile of a child asleep. The waters of the Nile were still as a pond; the morning breath was so gentle that the mirror-

like surface of the river was not yet broken with ripples, though boats with full sails were already flitting upon it like birds. The rafts of pines and cedars from Lebanon slowly floated along. Men, tiny as ants, dragged by a rope a huge barge with a granite obelisk, singing a mournful song; it made the stillness seem more still and the expanse of the river more limitless. The white houses of the City of the Sun, scattered about like dice in the narrow green strip of palm groves, were disappearing in the distance.

"What is the matter with you?" Dio asked Merira. "Happy? in good spirits? No, that's not it. . . . I have never seen you like this."

"I had a good night," Merira answered. "I slept for quite six hours on end."

He took a deep, eager breath. He was glad when he felt the smell of bats and not of dead rats or rotten fish; and to-day—what joy! he smelt nothing but morning freshness.

"And everything is good," he said, still more joyfully. "See how high the water is! Isn't it fine?"

"Very fine," she agreed.

"Just think, sixteen and a half cubits! The water hasn't risen so high for the last ten years!" Merira went on. "The country is saved if the rebels in the south do not destroy the canals. Look, a little ass in the field doesn't dare to put its foot in the ditch—ah, now he has done it, clever creature—and men are more stupid than asses!"

He added, after a pause:

"I had a good dream the other night. . . ."

"What was it?"

"It was about you. I dreamt we were children together walking in a lovely garden, better than Maru-Aton—a real paradise—and you were saying something very nice to me. I woke up and thought 'I will do what she told me.'"

"And what did I say?"

He shook his head and said nothing.

"Again something you can't tell?"

"No."

He turned away to hide from her the tears that came into his eyes:

"Don't judge me, O Lord, for my many sins! I am a man with no understanding of myself," he whispered again.

He suddenly struck the water with his harpoon so violently that he nearly upset the boat. Dio cried out. When he pulled the harpoon out of the water a fish was struggling on each side of it: an *in*, with a rectangular, wing-like fin on its back, glittering like ruby, sapphire and gold, and a *ha* with the monstrous head of an anteater, consecrated to the god Set. He threw both fishes at her feet and she admired the way they struggled, dying.

"Why do you say you have never seen me like this?" he asked.

"I don't know. You always jeer, and to-day you look as though you were going to smile. Quite like . . . ."

"Like whom?"

She stopped suddenly and looked down; she wanted to say 'quite like Tamu,' but suddenly she felt frightened and sorry—sorry for this one as for the other.

"Also something you can't tell?" he asked, smiling.

"No, I can't."

"There, there, look!" he pointed to something that lay on the sand-bank and seemed exactly like a greenish-black, slimy log.

"What is it?"

"A crocodile. It hid in the sand for the night and now it has crawled out and will warm itself in the sun; and at midday, when the north wind blows, it will open its mouth towards it to get cool. An intelligent beast. But an ibis's feather paralyzes it and then one can do anything with it . . ."

He spoke about indifferent things on purpose to hide his emotion, but went on smiling exactly like Tamu.

The boat cut into a dense mass of papyrus plants. Their umbrella-like tops quivered as though alive, the stems rustled and bent over the boat like two high green walls. The yellow *ambaki* flowers smelt of bitter almond and warm water and the pink lotoses, *nekhebs,* of sweet aniseed. Blue dragonflies whirred unceasingly over the floating leaves. An ichneumon, a sharp-faced little creature with whiskers, something between a cat and a rat, was stealing up the entangled papyrus-stems, and the bird-mother fluttering over her nest desperately flapped her wings to drive the robber away. Suddenly in the far distance there was a loud trumpet-call: it was a hippopotamus, roaring as it spouted water from its nostrils like a whale.

Water birds flew about in clouds: sacred herons—*benu*—with two long feathers thrown back over their heads, sacred ibises, bald-headed and white but

for a black tail and a black edge on the wings; wild ducks, geese, swans, cranes, spoonbills, plovers, water-hens, hoopoos, peewits, divers, pelicans, cormorants, golden-eyes, lapwings, magpies, snipe, fish-hawks and many others. They were singing, twittering, chirruping, calling, quacking, screeching, whistling, cackling, cawing, droning, clucking.

"Vepvet!" Merira called, and a huge yellow hunting cat, with emerald eyes, that had been sleeping at the bottom of the boat, jumped to him and settled beside him on the bow, pricking up its ears.

He threw a flat, curved tablet made of rhinoceros skin—a weapon of immemorial antiquity. It flew along, struck its aim and describing an arc in the air returned to him and fell at his feet. The cat jumped into the thicket and brought a bird that had been killed. He threw the weapon again, and the cat brought another bird, and soon the boat was so full of game that it began to sink.

They rowed to a little island surrounded on all sides with thick walls of papyrus, three times the height of man, bright green and fresh as in paradise. In days of old, Mother Isis brought up the baby Horus in such a papyrus nest.

They landed. A fisherman's net was stretched out on poles on the shore to dry. There was a bed of reeds under a shelter of dry palm leaves. Dio sat on the bed and Merira on the ground at her feet. The cat ate fish greedily.

"She is as good at scenting prey as Ruru was," Merira said.

"Why 'was'?" Dio asked in surprise.

"Don't you know? The poor creature was killed

the other day. Tuta wept over it as though it had been his own daughter and has fallen ill with grief."

"Who killed it?"

"I don't know. It was found dead in the garden. Someone must have climbed a tree and been listening at the window, and the cat smelt him out and rushed at him and he ripped its belly with a knife."

"But who could it have been?"

"Probably some spy of Mahu's."

"Impossible. Mahu knows that Tuta is a faithful servant of the king. Why should he be watched?

"He might well be. All we do at court is to watch one another."

"And you watch me?"

"I do. Do you remember how you spoke about me with the king in the desert? I know everything—I know that you betray me."

He gave her a long, intent look.

"No, Merira," she said quietly. "It is not I who betray you—you do it yourself. You deceive yourself: you want to hate him and you cannot—you love him. . . ."

"I don't know. Perhaps I do love him. But love, too, is sometimes cruel—more cruel than hate. It is said 'love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire; many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.' Do you know this?"

"I do. Is this how you love me, too?"

"What is my love to you? Why do you ask? Do you want to deceive me?"

"No. Even if I wanted to I could not: we know all about each other."

"Do we? There is no getting to the bottom of the soul—it is too deep."

"At the bottom of the soul is love; one who loves knows everything. Are you very unhappy?"

"And are you very sorry for me? It is a bad sign: if a woman pities a man she doesn't love him."

There was a silence. Then he spoke again in a changed voice, without looking at her.

"I have had another dream about you, a bad one. Only I don't know if it was a dream. Perhaps you know what it was—a dream or not?"

She lowered her eyes, feeling that he was looking at her: it was like spiders running over her naked body; she was ashamed and frightened as in that dream.

"No, Dio, I do not love you. To love a woman one must despise her just a little. I might love you when you are asleep or dead—as you were in that dream. You said then 'it is sweet to be weak, sweet to be only a woman.' But you wouldn't say that awake, would you? Why do you lie then? You are a woman after all: moths nest in clothes and slyness in woman. If you had only said to me then 'go away' I would have gone. And I will go now—you have only to tell me. . . ."

She put both her hands on his shoulders and said simply and quietly:

"Listen, my brother, three people have already perished through me; I don't want you to perish too. . . ."

"It wouldn't be through you, don't be afraid; I hated him before you came."

There was a long silence, then she asked, speaking still lower than before:

"What do you hate him for?"

"Don't you know? Surely you don't believe, do you, that King Akhnaton is the One who is to come?

"No. I know he is only His shadow."

"But he does believe it himself."

"No, he doesn't. That was your temptation, your snare, but he is free from it now."

"He is not—he never will be. I tempted him, you say? Why, could I ever have done it without him? I merely said aloud what he thought; I revealed his own secret to him. And do you imagine one can say 'I am He' and then repent? I don't know who has been led into temptation—I by him or he by me. But anyway, there is no greater temptation upon earth than for a man to say 'I am God.' Yes, he is only a shadow of the One to come; this one has said 'I will kindle the flame' and that One will kindle it. But maybe we still have time to put it out. . . ."

"No, you will not put it out. His fire is love! 'Many waters cannot quench love'—you have said so yourself. No, Merira, you will not rise against him!"

"Do you think I am afraid of him?"

"Not of him but of the One behind him."

"Liar, Murderer, Devil is behind him. If He came I would rise against Him, too!"

The green walls parted suddenly and the king's boat appeared. The king stood at the stern with Mahu and was saying something to him, pointing to the island.

"He is looking, he is looking at us!" Merira whispered in terror. "Let us hide!"

They both went into the papyrus thicket. The boat passed them.

"I believe you are right after all, Dio, and I will never rise against him," Merira said, with a quiet laugh, passing his hand over his eyes as though he had just awoken from a fearful dream. "I may rise against myself, but not against him. . . ."

And after a silence he asked:

"You won't tell him what we have been talking about, will you?"

"No, I won't," she replied and glancing at him understood more clearly than she had ever done before:

"He is an enemy."

IV

AAKERA was giving a feast. The pillared hall of the palace where the guests were assembled gave on to an open porch and the porch on to the river. The palm-shaped columns, decorated with a scaly design of coloured glass on a golden background, seemed made of precious stones, glittering in the light of candelabra, each of which resembled a burning bush; the yawning abyss of darkness gaped in between. There the rusty sickle of the waning moon shed its dim light on the ragged tops of the Lybian mountains and was reflected as a pillar of dull copper in the black rippled surface of the river, so wide that it was hard to believe it was a river and not the sea.

The night was still, but fresh, as often happens during the overflow. The gentle breeze from the north blew so evenly that the flames of the lamps were all bent to one side.

The blue ceiling, studded with golden stars, looked through the white smoke of incense like a real sky through the clouds.

The guests sat in a semi-circle in the square space that was free from columns: the king was in the middle, on his right sat Saakera, the heir-apparent, with his consort, Meritatona, the king's eldest daughter; then Ramose, Tuta, Ay; on the king's left

was the queen, next to her was an empty seat reserved for Merira, who had not yet arrived; then came Mahu, Dio, and others. Members of the royal family and senior dignitaries sat in arm-chairs and on folding chairs, and the lesser ones sat on carpets and mats on the floor.

Within the semi-circle stood a big, round, one-legged table of alabaster. It was covered with loaves of bread shaped like pyramids, cones, balls and sacred animals, dishes of food, covered with fresh leaves to protect the food from flies, and mounds of fruit: gigantic bunches of Lybian grapes, a foot long, the rare fruits of shakarab, spotted like a leopard's skin, and the egg-shaped persae in a four-petalled chalice, golden-coloured and fragrant as flowers. Four wine and beer stands made of trellised woodwork and garlanded with flowers stood round the table.

Nubian girls, dressed in white, transparent linen —'woven air'—or naked but for a narrow girdle just above the navel, served round the cups with food and drink. Meat was cut up into small pieces and eaten with the fingers, which were washed in scented water after every dish. Wine and beer were sucked through reeds.

Fans of ostrich feathers and flykillers of jackals' tails were being waved unceasingly to keep off the night midges, *zezet*.

Each guest wore on his head a tiny cup filled with fragrant ointment, with a lotos stuck through it, so that the flower hung over the forehead. Melting slowly with the warmth of the body and the heat of the room the ointment fell in drops upon the white linen of the dresses, leaving greasy yellow streaks

upon it; the greater the number of such streaks the better: it meant the guest had been well looked after. When the cup was empty the girls produced a new one offering the choice between *kemi,* 'the royal ointment,' or *anti,* 'the dew of the gods,' which gave a golden tint to the skin and made the face look 'like the morning star.'

"Where is Merira?" the king asked.

"He has promised to come, but he is not here yet. He is not well. He can't sleep," answered Saakera, the heir apparent, a young man with a beautiful face, fine and mournful like the sickle of the moon turning pale in the morning sky.

"Why don't you cure him, Pentu?" the king asked.

"There is only one certain remedy against sleeplessness, sire," Pentu, the physician, answered.

"What is it?"

"A clear conscience."

"But isn't his conscience clear?"

Pentu made no answer, as though he had not heard, and there was a general silence.

"Why are you eating so little, Tuta?" the host inquired solicitously. "This is your favourite dish, antelope from the salty plains. Isn't it cooked to your liking?"

"Oh, yes, prince, it is excellent; I have eaten much of it."

"He is telling fibs—he hasn't had a bite, I have seen myself," the king laughed. 'He is grieving over poor Ruru. Haven't they discovered yet who killed it?"

"No, they haven't," Tuta answered in confusion.

"They will soon discover it, I am on the track," Mahu said, looking intently at Tuta.

Tuta was more dead than alive: he took a piece of meat into his mouth and could not swallow it.

"What's the matter with you, stomach-ache again?" his consort, princess Ankhsenbatona, who sat next to him, asked him in a whisper.

"Yes," he answered with the languid air he always assumed when speaking about his health.

Ankhi knew that his stomach-ache was generally due to fear.

"What has frightened you?"

He said nothing.

"Speak! what is it? Ah, you insufferable creature!" she whispered furiously and pinched his back so viciously that he nearly cried out.

Ay saw Tuta's confusion and wanted to help him, but did not know how.

Ay's wife, the great royal nurse, Ty, was sitting next to him. Enormously stout—a regular toad—with a purplish face covered with warts that had red hair on them, the old lady was wearing a fiery-red wig, a Canaan novelty, and gold-coloured gloves, a Hittite novelty; though there was no need to wear them in a hot country like Egypt, she showed them off on every festive occasion. People thought her half-mad, but she was very cunning and intelligent, and a malicious gossip, especially in love affairs.

Soft-boiled ibis eggs were served. They were not eaten as a rule, for the ibis was a bird sacred to the god Tot. But this time all the company ate some to please the king and show their contempt for the false god.

Ty helped herself to three eggs. It was awkward to eat them with gloved hands and she smeared herself with the yolk which, however, was not very noticeable beside the yellow streaks from the ointment.

"Aïta! Aïta!" she suddenly said in a loud voice, when there was a silence and everyone was occupied with the eggs, and she gave a high-pitched little laugh, curiously out of keeping with her enormous size; it was like the silvery trill of a toad.

Ay looked at her and understood what he had to do. He began telling about the pretty Aïta, wife of one of the king's dignitaries who used to deceive her husband so boldly and cleverly under his very nose that everyone knew it except him.

"She had a feed, wiped her mouth and said 'I haven't done any wrong'," Ay concluded.

"What? What?" the king laughed. "She had a feed, wiped her mouth . . . ." he tried to repeat it but could not go on for laughter.

"Wiped her mouth and said 'I haven't done any wrong'," Ay repeated.

"And what is your other saying? 'It is no use crying . . . .'" the king began again and could not finish.

"No use crying over sour milk," Ay said.

Tuta was saved. Ruru was forgotten.

Meanwhile Dio was whispering with Mahu, the chief of the guards.

"And what if he does not come?" she asked.

"He is sure to come," Mahu answered. "How many have you hidden away?"

"Three hundred."

"That will do."

"Hadn't we better tell the king?"

"Heaven forbid! If he learns it, all is lost, he will not believe a word of it. We must catch the scoundrel red-handed. . . . Ah, there he is!"

Merira came in. Tuta almost fainted.

"Here he is, at last!" said the king, getting up to greet Merira.

He made him sit down next to the queen and began asking him about his health. Merira answered calmly, almost jokingly. But when a Nubian brought him a cup of perfume he sent her away with a grimace of disgust.

The little girls who sang and played the lute, the tambourine, the flute and the cithern sat down in a circle on the floor. Miruit, Pentaur's pupil whom Dio had brought with her from Thebes, stood in the middle. Her dark amber-coloured body could be seen through the flowing folds of the transparent dress. Her face, ugly, charming and dangerous, like the head of a snake, seemed tiny under the mass of the dull black hair powdered with blue.

The girls played and sang:

"Sweet one, you are sweet for love
Fairer than any woman,
Fairer than any girl,
Your hair is blacker than *abed* berries,
Your teeth are whiter than sunny flint.
Your lips are the bud of a flower,
Your arms are slender branches.
Two flowering crowns,
Your breasts are hardly formed,
Your nipples smell of myrrh."

Miruit was dancing the *dance de ventre*. The upper part of the body remained motionless and the

lower moved rapidly, although she stood on the same spot. Her head was thrown back, her lips open, her eyes dark and fixed, and the slender waist moved like a serpent's tongue; the belly rose and fell, the narrow, childish hips moved slower and slower as though prolonging the last tremours of passion. If she had really done before everyone the things her dance pictured, it would not have been so innocently shameless.

The women looked down, the men smiled, beating measure with their hands and the girls sang:

"You have captured my heart,
You have captured my heart
By a single look of your eyes.
How tender are your embraces,
How sweet your caresses!
Better than wine is your kiss,
The odour of your sweet body
Is better than any perfume."

When Miruit had finished the dance the choir of the blind men who had sung at the Sun's festival entered the hall. They sat down on the floor and sang to the sounds of the harp:

"One generation replaces another,
The sun rises, the sun sets again,
The nostrils of all breathe the morning air,
Until man goes to his place of rest.
No one can return from there, no one can tell
What awaits us beyond the tomb.
Rejoice then, O mortal, in thy day of life,
Until the day of weeping comes.
I have heard of what befell my forefathers:
The walls of their tombs are destroyed,
Their coffins are empty like coffins of beggars,
Forsaken by everyone on earth.
Their dwelling place knows them no more.
It is as though they had never been:
Rejoice then, mortal, in thy day of life!
Oil thy body with fragrant oil

Make lotos garlands for thy arms
And the breasts of thy sister beloved.
Enjoy the music and the songs
Forget thou all thy sorrows,
Remember nothing but the joy,
Until the day thy boat shall land
Upon the shores of Silence.

The song stopped and the breath of the night blew fresher than before from the black gaps between the pillars; the flames of the lamps bent lower, all on one side, as though someone invisible had come into the room.

"Isn't it a fine song?" Saakera asked.

"No, prince, it isn't," answered Panehesy, the second priest of Aton and the head of the king's spies—a man without age who looked like a eunuch. He was a mild fanatic, 'a holy fool,' in the words of Ay.

"What's wrong with it?"

"It's godless. If it is true, our faith is in vain."

"I would answer you, my friend, but it doesn't behove ignorant men to speak in the presence of the wise."

"Speak, Saakera," the king said. "I like listening to you. You say what many people think, but don't say, and to me even a bitter truth is dearer than a sweet lie."

"Listen then, Panehesy," Saakera began. "Let the son of the Sun who has come down from heaven speak of heavenly things, and I will speak of the earthly. We are all creatures of yesterday and we know nothing, for our days upon earth are like a shadow. The same fate befalls the righteous and the unrighteous, the good and the wicked, the clean and

the unclean, him that sacrifices and him that does not sacrifice. A man has no pre-eminence above a beast: all are of the dust and all turn to dust again. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun and believe the dead are happier than the living, and happiest of all is he who was never born!"

"What are we to do then, we who have been born?" Panehesy asked.

"The song gives an answer: rejoice in your day, mortals, but remember that the peace of the god with the unbeating heart is the better portion."

"Thank you very much, our kind host, you have given us a treat!" Ay laughed. "Why, I couldn't swallow a morsel to the accompaniment of a song like that!"

"Why not, my friend? Remembrance of sorrow in the midst of joy is like salt in one's food."

"That's all very well, but every condiment should be used in moderation, and this is too much salt."

"No, this is not salt," Pentu the physician said, quietly, as though to himself.

"What is it then?" Ay asked.

"Poison," Pentu answered, quieter still. Mahu glanced at Merira. He sat with his head bent and his eyes half closed, his face as unmoved as that of a man asleep or dead.

"Why don't you speak, sire?" Panehesy cried, turning to the king.

"I don't speak because there is nothing to say: he is right," the king answered.

"Well said, Abby darling!" Princess Meritatona exclaimed, clapping her hands with delight.

Everyone looked at her with surprise.

"What does this mean, sire?" Panehesy faltered.

"It means, my friend, that if there is no God man is worse off than a beast, because a beast does not know its end and a man does."

"But there is God."

"Yes, there is. Everyone says there is, but acts as though there were not. And haven't you read, my son, that we shall have to give a terrible answer for empty words? Pentu, too, is right: there is poison in that song. But poison may be a medicine. There are two endings to the song: one is 'eat, drink and die' and another 'feed the starving, give drink to the thirsty' . . . . But it is better not to speak of it. God is a spring in the wilderness, sealed for the talkers and open for the silent. Merira is silent and he is right, more right than any of us. Don't be vexed with our chatter, our silent friend, forgive us!"

Merira made no answer, he merely looked at the king and his face remained as unmoved as though he were asleep or dead.

Suddenly there came through the stillness the slow, measured clang of the cymbals on the roof of Aton's temple, as though a huge heart of brass began beating in the night.

All rose from their seats; the king, the queen, the princesses, the heir-apparent and Merira walked to the altar that stood in the depths of the room before a bas-relief of the god Aton.

"Glory be to the unseen god, to the midnight sun!" Merira intoned. "Oh, mighty Falcon, with broad wings, flying through the two skies, hastening in thy sleepless course through the sky underneath

the earth, to arise in thy place in the morning, the most secret of secret gods. In thy life the dead come to life again; thou givest their nostrils the breath of life and air to their stifled throats. Thou bringest light to those who are in death; glorifying thee from within their tombs, the dead lift up their hands and those in the earth rejoice!"

When the cymbals sounded Mahu and Dio went into the adjoining room. He walked up to the wall, knocked at it gently and put his ear to it. A knock came from the other side, too. The block of stone in the wall turned round like a swing door, leaving a narrow opening. The palace walls were double and there was a hiding place between them. No one knew of it except the king, Mahu and Ramose.

The Hittite Amazons of the king's bodyguard came out of the open door noiselessly like shadows. The dwarf Iagu jumped out after them, ran up to Mahu and asked in a whisper:

"Where are they?"

"Who?"

"Tuta, Merira."

"Why do you want to know?"

"I won't give them to anyone, I will throttle them with my own hands."

It was Iagu who had killed Ruru: he had climbed the tree by the window, looked into the room, listened to all that the conspirators said and told Mahu.

"You are a fine fellow, Iagu!" said Mahu, patting the dwarf on the head. "Tiny as you are, you have a lion's heart. But there's one thing, my friend: if

you want to save the king, you must not touch them, do you hear?"

"I hear," Iagu answered, grinding his teeth.

"Make haste, make haste!" Dio hurried them.

"Don't be afraid, we'll be in time," Mahu said calmly. 'You go to the king, and I will wait here. We will run out as soon as you call."

Dio returned to the guest chamber. Both Tuta and Ay had gone. The king stood by the altar, whispering a prayer. Dio placed herself behind him, opposite Merira.

A table with bread, wine and fruit stood near the altar. Merira went to it and began preparing the libation cup.

He then returned to the altar, holding the cup in his hands.

Dio noticed a ring with a carbuncle on his finger; he had not worn it before.

Their eyes met. "Who is to drink the cup?" he read the question in her eyes. "You will see," she read the answer in his.

He approached the king and said:

'King Uaenra, Sun's only Son, light of light, spirit of spirit, flesh of Sun's flesh, accept the cup of life, drink the cup of immortality, thou who overcomest death!"

He held out the cup to the king. But before Akhnaton had had time to take it, Dio snatched it out of Merira's hand and threw it on the floor.

"What are you doing?" the king cried.

"I've poured out the poison," Dio answered and she called:

"Mahu! Mahu!"

The door was flung open, and the Hittite women, led by Mahu, ran into the room. Some surrounded the king, others occupied the porch and mounted guard by the doors, but most of them ran to the next room where a battle with a detachment of Midian mercenaries had started.

"Rebellion! Save the king!" the dignitaries cried, rushing about the room in search of an exit.

Suddenly there was a loud hammering at the door from which the Hittite women had come. Both halves of the door were creaking and shaking under the blows of the axe from the other side. No one had expected an attack from the rear. The Amazons had barely had time to run to the door. A new battle began there.

Arrows and spears whistled in the air. A spear struck the stand with wines, and it fell with a clatter of broken crockery. A candelabrum was overthrown and the mats on the floor caught fire.

"Fire! Fire!" the dignitaries shouted, but they did nothing to put it out.

A Nubian girl seized a carpet and flung it over the flame, extinguishing it at once.

An arrow pierced the fragrant cup on Ty's head and tore off the wig, leaving her bald head bare. But the old woman sat unperturbed and did not even take her gloves off; rebellion seemed to be part of the court ceremonial to her.

Miruit, wounded in the stomach with a spear, lay in a pool of blood on the floor, scratching the ground with her nails and showing her teeth as it were in a smile, and the narrow childish hips moved slower and slower as though ending the dance of love.

The Hittite Amazons might not have withstood the attack of the Midians, had not half the mercenaries deserted the conspirators at the last moment.

The noise of the battle began to subside, the rebels were in retreat. The women had conquered the men. It had all happened so quickly that those present had hardly come to their senses.

Suddenly Ramose, lightly wounded in the left arm, came into the chamber dragging Tuta after him. He threw him at the king's feet and cried:

"Here is the chief criminal, sire! It is for his sake the other one has been working," he pointed to Merira and turned to Tuta again. 'Confess, you rascal, or I'll kill you like a dog."

He raised the knife over Tuta. The king seized his hand.

"Let go the knife!"

Ramose did not obey and, shaking with anger, grumbled:

"Will you forgive this one, too?"

"It's for me to decide what I will do, but you let go the knife!"

The king pulled the knife out of Ramose's hand by force and threw it aside.

"Woe to us! God will not save him who ruins himself!" the old man muttered, sinking into an armchair heavily, exhausted by his wound.

Tuta lay at the king's feet.

"Is it true that you have done it?" the king asked him.

"Not I, not I, sire, God sees it isn't I . . . ." Tuta babbled, pointing his finger at Merira.

Merira stood at a distance without moving; he

looked so unconcerned that he seemed not to see or hear anything. Someone had tied his hands behind his back.

The king went up to him and asked:

"You wanted to kill me, Merira?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you prepare the way for the Son of perdition."

"Haven't we prepared it together?"

"No, not together."

"Why have you lied to me, then?"

"To destroy your work."

"But why did you rise against Him?"

"May I ask you a favour, sire?"

"Do."

"Don't ask me about anything and put me to death as soon as possible."

"No, Merira, I will not put you to death."

"You will forgive me like Tuta?" Merira said, with a smile that looked like a grimace of disgust. He had spoken with his eyes on the ground; suddenly he raised them and said looking straight into the king's eyes:

"Do what you like, but remember, Uaenra, that if you don't kill me, I will . . . ."

He did not finish, but the king understood 'I will kill you.'

He put both hands on Merira's shoulders, and, also looking straight into his eyes, said, with a gentle smile:

"Remember, you too, Merira: whatever happens, I love you."

V

The king was the last to learn that Princess Makitatona was with child. She confessed it to him herself, but did not say who the man was and so implored him not to ask her that he had pity and reassured her:

"Don't tell me if you don't want to; you will tell me when you feel that you can."

He blamed himself for everything: "If I loved her more, this would not have happened!" He was doing himself injustice: he loved all his daughters and Maki more than the rest.

He thought the queen knew, but she did not. The princess's nurse, old Asa, may have suspected something, but she would rather have had her tongue cut off than said anything.

There were strange rumours in the town: it was said that the princess had been seduced by a tramp, a runaway slave or, perhaps, by the Jew Iserker himself; it would not have been very difficult, because the king's daughters were not properly looked after; Princess Makitatona had been seen to go out alone into the desert through the secret gate in the Maru-Aton garden wall. And people added, not without malice, that the Jews were highly delighted, for they thought that the princess would give birth to their Messiah.

The dwarf, Iagu, was brought one day to the palace half dead: he had had a fight with a crowd of street ruffians who were gazing at a charcoal drawing of the princesses made on the wall with an indecent inscription beneath it.

The king allowed Maki to live in retirement in the Maru-Aton palace until her confinement. She spent the days there in a perfectly dark room with the shutters closed and the windows curtained: she could not bear the light. She had had attacks of this disease before: daylight seemed to stab not only her eyes, but her whole body as with a knife; if a ray of sunshine penetrated into the room, she cried and groaned as with intolerable pain.

The eldest princess, Meritatona, or Rita, Saakera's wife, was inseparable from Maki. There was a year's difference between the sisters—one was fifteen, the other fourteen; they loved each other tenderly though they were as different as day and night.

Maki had been betrothed to Saakera, who was passionately in love with her; she loved him, too, but renounced him for Rita's sake and made a vow of virginity to the god Attis. The god's chapel was in the hilly desert not far from Maru-Aton. The droning of the eunuchs engaged in their devotions sounded like jackals howling in the night.

Some ten days after Saakera's feast Maki and Rita were sitting at Maru-Aton late one evening in a long and narrow Water House, supported by palm-shaped pillars with a labyrinth of eleven ornamental pools. Their slanting walls were covered with paintings of water plants, lotoses and papyrus, that seemed

to be growing out of water; above them were painted pomegranate bushes and clumps of vine. Beds of living flowers were all round.

Rita and Maki were reclining on pillows by the water's edge, under bushes of white, pink, and red roses.

"Why didn't you tell sooner, you silly? We could have arranged things, and now look at yourself: it is too late," said Rita, feeling Maki's body as an experienced midwife. Pregnancy seemed monstrous in a little creature like Maki, almost a child.

"Saakera's Ethiopian has some stuff. Shall I ask her? Perhaps it could still be done. . . ."

"Oh, Rita, don't speak of it, please don't!"

"Very well, don't whine. . . . What was I talking about? Yes, about Ankhi. She wants to run away and join Tuta. The rascals did not stay long in prison—they escaped to Nut-Amon; I expect they'll stir up a rising there. No, I would not have let them off: they ought to have been killed on the spot. But our courtiers are all traitors and scoundrels."

She spoke listlessly, evidently thinking of something else. Suddenly she smiled, as though recalling something funny.

"Shiha is a clever man! Do you know what he says of Enra?" Shiha was the high priest and eunuch of the god Attis.

"What?" Maki asked. She started slightly at the name of Shiha and Rita noticed it.

"He says Enra lives as though all were well with the world; but all is not well!"

"All is not well?" Maki repeated, frowning with the childish effort to understand.

"Do you remember Yuma's death?" Rita went on. Yuma was a little black slave who died of a tarantula sting.

"She turned greyish-white all over, just like an autumn fly covered with mildew, and a smell of corruption came from her before she died. And the day before yesterday someone had attacked a little girl of five by the very walls of Aton's temple, strangled her and thrown the body to the pigs. Is that well? And Enra lives as though none of these things happened. Perhaps all is well for God, but Enra is not God; people say he is, but he himself knows he isn't."

She pondered for a while and began again:

"He does not know how to cry, but one cannot live without tears; nothing is sweeter than tears . . ."

"Does Shiha say that?" Maki asked.

"No, I say it . . . . or perhaps Shiha, I don't remember . . . . What is Aton, the Sun? A spark in darkness: death will blow and the sun will be extinguished. Darkness is more than light; first there was darkness and then light. Maybe God dwells in darkness.'

She laughed suddenly.

"You, too, are a sensible girl; you are afraid of light and love darkness. The daughter does not take after the father."

Maki listened greedily; sometimes she strove to say something, but words froze on her lips; she merely looked at her sister with wide open eyes and seemed like one bound hand and foot waiting for a blow.

"Well, that's enough moping, let us go! You

must walk about, it is good for you," Rita said, lifting her with apparent roughness, but in reality with tender care, and led her into the garden.

It was dusk. The sky was clear, but mist was creeping over the ground. The water in the river had only just returned to its normal level; there were still pools of water about. Drops fell from the wet leaves. Frogs croaked ecstatically. The smell of the flowers was intoxicating. All at once the mist turned rosy from the moon that was rising invisibly.

They walked to the big pond where Maki's birch tree grew. It had never recovered after the scorching Sheheb. Everything round it was green and in flower, but it was dead and only on some of the bare branches a withered leaf showed black.

Maki put her arms round the pale, slender stem and pressed her cheek against it.

"Poor, poor darling!" she whispered tenderly as though saying good-bye to a friend who had died.

"A-ah, you remember the superstition!" Rita said, with a laugh. "If one plants a tree and it dies, the person who planted it will die also. Well, even if you do die, that's nothing very dreadful—you will have had a child anyway. To think of God sending such happiness to one who doesn't want it! Why, I would die ten times if I could only have a child."

After walking round the big pond, they came to the Lotos pond, with Aton's chapel on a little island and a small bridge leading to it. A huge lotos, not yet fully opened, showed white on the water. A boat was tied near by. Rita jumped into it, and seeing a garden knife at the bottom, took it to cut the

lotos; she gave the flower to Maki and hid the knife in the bosom of her dress.

They went back to the Water-House and sat down in the old place.

"You haven't been to see Shiha for some time, have you?" Rita asked.

"No, I haven't."

"And I often go to him. It is interesting. A regular abode of love. All our dignitaries' wives keep going there. These eunuchs are excellent matchmakers. And they are themselves fond of women—and the women like it, of course. Shiha tempts me, too, with the god's marriage-bed: 'the god will come down to you in the night like a bridegroom to his bride,' he says. But I am not a fool to buy a pig in a poke. Instead of a god a slave or a dirty Jew may come and disgrace one . . ."

She paused and then spoke again, looking straight into Maki's eyes:

"Extraordinary! How is it possible not to find out who the father of your child is? Why, I would get the wretch from the bottom of the sea! But Shiha knows who came to you then. Would you like me to threaten him so that he should tell? . . . Well, why are you silent? Do you want me to?"

"Do what you like, but don't torment, don't torment me so! Better make an end of it." Maki moaned, pale and trembling as though she were on the rack.

Rita drew back, and she trembled, too.

"Make an end of it? Do you think I know everything and merely tease you, play cat and mouse with you? Well, perhaps I do know . . . . What's the

matter, why are you so frightened? Perhaps you know, too? A-ah, I've caught you! Speak, tell me, who is it? He?"

"Yes, he, Saakera," Maki answered, with apparent calm, looking straight into her eyes. "Well, kill me, I don't care . . ."

Rita brought the knife out of her bosom and flung it far away. She buried her face in her hands and sat for a few minutes without moving; then she drew her hands away from her face and put them on Maki's shoulders.

"There, it's a good thing you told me or very likely I would have killed you, really. Do you remember Ankhi's doll?"

When Rita and Ankhi were little they had once a fight over a clay doll, a hideous thing that they both loved passionately. Rita took it from her sister, who pulled it out of her hands, and broke it into bits against the wall. Then Rita fell upon Ankhi like a fury and bit her throat; the nurses had difficulty in dragging her off. And in the night she stole away into the garden and ate some poison berries, 'spiders' eggs'; she very nearly died.

"The devil entered into me then, and now, too. We have all taken after father—we are possessed . . . . Yes, it is a good thing you told me. All is well now—it's over! But I do wonder at myself: I thought I would kill you if you told me; and now I don't feel anything. Silly girls had a fight over a doll, but perhaps it was not worth while, after all. You know what a number of wives Saakera has. Sheep are in the stalls, fish in the hatchery and we in his palace. You and I are no better than the others.

You gave me your betrothed, I gave you my husband, so we are quits and that's an end of it. We'll be friends as before, better than before. When the baby is born—it must be a boy, we don't want a girl —we'll look after it together . . . . What's the matter, why are you silent again? Don't you believe me?"

"I do, but I am afraid . . . ."

"What of?"

"I don't know . . . . You may forgive me, but I will torment myself to death. . . . Oh, Rita, darling, why didn't you kill me straight away? It would have been better to make an end of it!"

"Nonsense! All will be forgiven and forgotten if only one lives and loves. And you do love me, don't you—more than before?"

"More, much more! I love you dreadfully, that's why I will die—because I love you so. You know, Rita, if one loves very much, one cannot live, it's too great a joy . . . ."

"It was after *that* you got to love me so?" Rita asked, with slight mockery.

Instead of answering Maki hid her face on Rita's breast and burst into tears.

"There, that will do," Rita said, drily. "It is time to go home—see what heavy dew there is."

She took her by the arms and again led her along carefully like a nurse.

They went indoors. Rita put her sister to bed and sat down beside her, waiting for her to go to sleep.

"Don't go," Maki begged.

"I won't, don't be afraid, I'll sleep here beside you."

"You do love me, yes?" Maki whispered in her ear.

"No, I don't love you a bit. Why, you silly girl, if I didn't love you, I wouldn't torment you so. . . . there, that's enough talking, go to sleep."

"No, wait a minute, what was I going to say? . . . Oh, yes! You know I do not know for certain who came to me then. I told you it was he, Saakera, but I don't really know—perhaps it wasn't he."

"Who was it, then?"

"He Whom I was expecting. I doubted, I did not believe—and this is why I suffer now. I shall die in misery, but when I am dead, perhaps He will come again."

"There, don't let us talk of it, sleep. Shall I tell you a story?"

"Do," Maki answered in a sleepy, childish voice.

"Once upon a time there lived a king and queen," Rita began the tale of the Bewitched Prince, in a sing-song voice like the old nurse, Asa. "One day they prayed to the gods and the gods gave them a son. And when he was born the seven Hathor came to decree his destiny and said, 'this man will meet with death from a crocodile, a snake, or a dog.' And the king was very, very sorry when he heard of this. And he caused a tower to be built in the mountains and settled the prince there. And the prince was very, very happy there . . . . "

She stopped, listened to her sister's even breathing and kissing her on the eyes, that she might have good dreams, went out of the room.

Old Asa, the princesses' nurse, could not go to sleep in her stuffy room and went out into the

garden; seeing something white flit among the trees she was frightened and wondered if it were Tiy—she knew that the dead queen walked about at night. But, recognizing Princess Meritatona, she called to her. The girl stopped, looked round without answering and ran along, disappearing among the thick bushes.

Used as Asa was to the princess's whims, she was surprised and then frightened—in a different way than at first: she felt there was something really alarming about the white phantom.

She ran after Rita, but her old legs did not obey her very well. She went on and on, calling her name, but there was no trace of her.

She met the gardener.

"Have you seen the princess?"

"Yes, I have."

"Where?"

"On the Lotos pond, in the chapel."

"What was she doing there?"

"I can't say."

"Let us go and look."

They walked to the chapel. The gardener did not dare to go in; Asa went in, but ran out immediately, screaming wildly, and fell to the ground, almost knocking the gardener off his feet.

He went into the chapel and saw the princess hanging on the brass rod of the curtain before the altar. She had made the noose out of the curtain drawstring but so badly that it slipped off. Hanging unevenly, her body rested with the toes of the left foot on the corner of the bench she had knocked

down after climbing on to it to throw the string over the rod.

When the gardener cut the string and took the noose off Rita's neck she did not breathe and her face was so blue and fixed that he thought her dead.

Maki dreamt that she was lying on the marriage-bed in a high tower in the starry sky, waiting for Him as she had done then, in the temple of Attis; she knew that He would come and that His face would be like the moon, the sun of the night, not burning, not terrible, like the face of the god whose name is Quiet Heart.

She woke up and called:

"Rita!"

She looked round—there was no one in the room; only the moon looked in at the window, bright as the sun of the night.

Suddenly far away in the garden cries were heard. Maki jumped up, ran into the garden and listened. The cries came nearer and nearer. Men with torches ran about shouting.

Maki ran towards the torches. The men were carrying something long and white. Maki rushed forward with a shriek. The men made way for her. Moonlight fell upon Rita's face, and Maki fell fainting upon the ground.

Rita was in a deep swoon. She was saved in the end, but for several weeks she was at death's door as in childhood when she had eaten 'spiders' eggs.'

The same night Maki's labour pains began and by the morning she was safely delivered of a son.

VI

HERE was brilliant sunshine outside, but it was dark as night in the bed-chamber of the Maru-Aton palace, with the shutters closed and the windows curtained; only the gilded columns glimmered faintly in the dim lamplight.

A bed of carved ebony and ivory, painted and gilded, stood in the middle of the room on a platform with four steps. It was shaped like a fantastic monster, a mixture of crocodile and hippopotamus, with lion's feet and open jaws: it guarded the sleeper; the more fearful the bed, the sweeter the sleep. Strangely convex, round and hard, with a wooden crescent for a pillow, it seemed uncomfortable, but was in truth better than any other bed, for it was cool to sleep on in the hot nights when feather beds and pillows were unendurable.

Princess Makitatona lay on the bed. On the fourth day after her delivery she had been attacked with child-bed fever.

The dark, stuffy room smelt of drugs. Pentu, the physician, was pounding in a mortar of stone a complicated remedy, composed of forty-six ingredients, corresponding to the same number of blood vessels in the human body. In addition to medicinal herbs it

contained lizard's blood, sulphur from pigs' ears, powder from the head and wings of the sacred beetle, Kheper, a pregnant woman's milk, a hippopotamus's tooth and flies' dirt.

In another corner of the room a Babylonian sorcerer, Assursharatta, was boiling in a cauldron the blood of a freshly slain lamb with magical herbs and muttering a spell against the seven demons of fever:

Sibiti shunu, sibiti shunu,
Sibit adi shina shunu.
They are seven, they are seven,
They are seven twice over.
There are seven of them in heaven,
There are seven of them in hell.
They are neither male nor female,
They are childless and unmarried.
Whirlwinds that bring destruction
Do not know what mercy is,
Do not bend their ear to prayer.
They are evil, they are mighty,
They are seven, they are seven!

But nothing helped the patient—neither the medicines nor the spells, nor even the healing water from the well of the Sun in Heliopolis, where the god Ra washed his face when he lived on earth.

In vain old Asa whispered the incantation:

Mother Isis cries
From the top of the hill:
"Horus my son,
The hill is on fire,
Bring me water,
Quench the fire."

The fire of the fever would not be quenched.

In vain the queen read over her daughter the prayer of Mother Isis. When a scorpion stung baby Horus she cried to the sun and the sun was darkened,

night was upon the earth until the god Tot healed the baby and gave it back to its mother. Since then the magical prayer of Isis had always been read over sick children.

"Stand still, O Sun, stand still until the child is restored to its mother!" the queen repeated with frenzied entreaty, but she knew the miracle would not happen, the sun would not stop.

She recalled the hymn to Aton:

> Thou conquerest all through love,
> Thou soothest the babe in the womb
> Before its mother can soothe it.

But now He failed to soothe her.

> Thou hast mercy upon a worm
> And upon the midges of the air.

But now He had no mercy upon her.

The king and queen never left the invalid's side, but she was delirious and did not recognize them. If a ray of sunlight penetrated between the curtains or through a crack in the door, she grew restless and cried:

"It is coming, it is coming again! There it is stretching out its leg . . . . Abby darling, do drive it away, quick! It will seize me and suck me dry like a fly . . . whoever could have let a spider into the sky?"

The king understood: Aton the Sun was the spider, the hand shaped rays were the spider's legs.

But most often she talked in her delirium about Shiha, the eunuch.

"Shiha, what does it mean 'light is greater than darkness'? Who has blasphemed against divine dark-

ness? Do you say King Uaenra is godless? . . . How dare you, you old monkey? . . . . Drink, drink! Isn't there something cooler? You gave me boiling water last time, it scalded my mouth . . . ."

They gave her the freshest water out of porous Tyntyrian vessels, but she pushed the cup away:

"Hot water again!"

The baby boy had been born prematurely; it had no nails, no hair and was weak and pale like a blade of grass grown in darkness. It hardly cried at all and only wrinkled its face painfully at the lamplight.

"It isn't right for a baby to be in darkness: it may go blind; it must be taken into the sunshine," the midwives decided.

But as soon as they took it out into the light of day it screamed and struggled as in a fit; they had to take it back into the dark. It was born an enemy of Aton the Sun.

"Is it night outside?" Maki asked in one of her lucid intervals.

"No, it is day," the king answered.

"The day of life is short, the night of death is long," she said, with a quiet smile, looking into his eyes, as it were into his very heart. "Shiha says 'darkness was before light; sunshine is a veil over darkness.' Shall the dead see the sun? What do you think, Enra?"

He was about to answer, but she began to wander again.

"A hen, a white hen with a red wig on like Ty's . . . It is running after me. . . . Oh, it has stuck its teeth into me!"

The king remembered that the white hen was the

mate of the cock with which he and the princesses had played once. Old Asa wept bitterly: she thought the hen with teeth was a bad omen.

"Do explain, Shiha," Maki wandered, "King Uaenra is wiser than all the sons of men: how is it he does not know death? He lives and sings to the sun as though there were no death and all were well . . . What will he sing when he does know death?"

Sometimes the king fancied it was not mere delirium: it was as though she knew that he was there without seeing him and spoke for his benefit, passed dreadful judgment upon him, laughed at him with a terrible laugh.

"Enra, Enra, why don't you pray?" the queen repeated like one insane, looking at him with dry, tearless eyes. "Pray! Your prayer is strong: the Father will hear His son. Save her, Enra!"

The king was silent. He felt so ashamed that he could have screamed with shame, as with pain, but worse than shame, pain and death was the mockery "what will you sing when you do know death?"

At the same time princess Meritatona was lying ill in the apartments of Saakera, the heir-apparent.

Maki kept talking of her as of one dead.

"All through me, through me!" she repeated in anguish.

"But, darling, Rita is alive," her mother said, trying to comfort her. But she would not believe it.

"No, mother, don't deceive me, I saw how they carried her, dead."

"She might be saved if only she believed me," the queen thought. "But how can I convince her? And what has happened between them? A fine mother I am—I don't know why one daughter strangled herself and by whom the other has had a child. . . . Perhaps Enra knows? He spoke with her then—he must know."

She questioned the king when they were alone together.

"Enra, do you know who the baby's father is?"

"No, I don't know."

"Haven't you asked her?"

"I have, but she did not say."

"How is it you didn't find out, how could you have left her to face such torture alone?"

"I pitied her."

"And don't you pity her now? Enra, Enra, what have you done!"

The baby did not live long: it died by the evening of the fifth day as quietly as though it had gone to sleep.

"Where is the boy?" Maki asked, coming to herself.

"It is asleep," the queen answered.

"Never mind, I'll be very careful, let me have him!"

No one moved or spoke.

"Give him to me, do!" Maki repeated, looking round at them all. "Mother, where is he? Tell me the truth. . . . What has happened? Is he dead?"

The queen covered her face with her hands.

"Well, perhaps it is better so," Maki said quietly. "We shall soon be together. . . ."

That same night before dawn the death struggle began. She no longer tossed about or wandered; she lay quite naked: the lightest covering oppressed her; the slender, childish body seemed flat and crushed as though it had been trodden on like a blade of grass; the head with the elongated skull was thrown back, the eyes closed, the face immovable and the breathing so faint that at times it was not noticeable.

Pentu, the physician, brought to her lips a round brass mirror and when it grew slightly clouded, he said:

"She breathes."

Suddenly she opened her eyes and called:

"Enra, where is Enra?"

"Here," the king answered bending over her, and she whispered in his ear, like a blade of grass rustling:

"Open the shutters."

He knew she was afraid of light and did not venture to open all the shutters at once, but ordered them to draw the curtains from one window only.

"All, all," she whispered.

All the windows were flung open. The morning sun flooded the room—the rays of the god Aton like a child's hands embraced her naked body.

"Lift me up," the blade of grass rustled, and the king lifted her as easily as though she were a blade of grass. The sun lighted her face.

"Akhnaton, Sun's joy, Sun's only Son!" she said, looking into his eyes so that he understood this was not delirium, "I know that you are . . . . "

She did not finish, but he understood: "I know that you are He."

Suddenly she trembled in his arms, like a leaf in a storm. He laid her down on the bed.

Pentu put the mirror to her lips, but this time its brass surface remained clear. The rays of the Sun—a child's hands—embraced the body of the dead.

There was the sound of weeping in the chamber. The women cried, wailed frantically, beat their breasts, tore their hair, scratched their own faces till they bled, with a kind of rapture of despair. But all was decorous like a holy rite: this was how they had wailed thousands of years before and how they would wail thousands of years hence.

The king heard the wailing, but there was bitter laughter in his heart: "you are He!"

VII

WANT to have Maki buried according to the ancient custom," the queen said.

"It shall be as you wish," the king answered. He understood what 'according to the ancient custom' meant. The hieroglyphics and mural paintings of the new tombs in the province of Aton contained no name or image of the ancient gods, no prayers, no incantations from the ancient scrolls of Going out into the World, Unsealing of lips and eyes, from the Book of the Gates, the Book of what is beyond the Tomb; no name or image of Osiris himself, the bringer of life to the dead.

It was only now that the king grasped the meaning of the inscription in Merira's tomb: 'may Aton and Unnofer revive the flesh on my bones.' Unnofer was the Good Spirit, Osiris, the King Akhnaton himself. There was a challenge and a temptation in it: "if you are He, conquer death!"

"I am not He! I am not! I am not!" he wanted to cry out in terror.

The mild fanatic, "the holy fool," Panehesy, looked straight into his eyes, as though asking: "Will you renounce the work of your whole life, will you lie, You-Who-live-in-truth, Ankh-em-maat?" And he read in his eyes the answer, "Yes, I will lie."

The best embalmers of Thebes, Memphis and He-

liopolis, *herhebs* and *mesras,* "divine sealers, cutters and cleaners," were working at the dead body of princess Makitatona.

Cauldrons were boiling night and day in the House of Life, the embalming chamber: ointments and unguents were being cooked—balm, styrax, cinnamon, myrrh and cassia; piles of wood were heaped up—sandal, terebinth, cedar, currant wood, mastic and the fragrant wood of the shuu tree; heaps of incense from Punt in lumps as big as a fist lay about. Clouds of dust rose over the copper mortars in which powders were made. Anyone unaccustomed to these pungent smells would have fainted coming into the chamber.

For thirty days and thirty nights they were cleaning, soaking, drying, salting, embalming, smoking and pickling the body.

The king watched everything. He saw the entrails being taken out through a slanting slit in the stomach, and the lapis lazuli sun beetle, Kheper, being put in the place of the heart. He heard the cracking of the bones when the nose was broken and the brain scooped out with a long flint knife.

Eyes of glass were set into the empty sockets. The hair of the wig, eyebrows and eyelashes was smoothed carefully. The nails, finger and toe, were gilded. A narrow plaited Osiris's beard in a wooden box was tied to the chin, for, in the resurrection of the dead, woman becomes man, the god Osiris. The bandage of the god Ra was put round the forehead, of the god Horus round the neck, of the god Tot on the ears, of the goddess Hathor on the mouth. And the mummy spun round and round like a spindle in

the clever hands that bound it in endless bandages like a chrysalis in a cocoon.

A wooden, crescent-shaped support for the head was prepared and a prayer to the Sun—not the new god, Aton, but to the ancient god Ra—was written on a new sheet of papyrus: "Give warmth under his head. Do not forget his name. Come to the Osiris Makitaton. His name is the Radiant, the Ever-Living, the Ancient of Days. He is Thee."

Thus a new great and terrible god Makitaton grew out of little Maki.

Ancient wisdom went hand in hand with ancient crudeness and childishness: the hieroglyphic of the serpent in the tomb inscription was cut into two, so that the snake should not sting the dead, and fledgelings on the paintings had their feet cut so that they should not run away. A silver boat was placed in the tomb for the dead to sail the Sunset Sea, also a mirror, rouge, powder, a book of fairy tales and draughts: the dead could play a game with her soul; toys were also put in, among them Ankhi's broken doll, carefully pieced together.

A tomb effigy was made for the mummy: the bird Ba with a human face and hands, the soul of the dead girl, placing its hands upon her heart and looking lovingly upon her face was saying:

"The heart of my birth, my mother's heart, my earthly heart, do not forsake me. Thou art in me; thou art my Ka, my Double within my body; thou art Khnum, the Potter who hath made my limbs."

"The Germinating Osiris was prepared, too: linen was stretched on a wooden frame, the likeness of Osiris's mummy was drawn upon it, a thin layer of

black earth was placed over it and thickly sown with wheat. The frame was watered until the seeds germinated; then the crop was cut down smoothly like grass on the lawn. This green, spring-like resurrected body of Osiris was placed in the tomb by the side of the corpse. The living seemed to be teaching the dead: "Look, the seed has come to life—you do the same!"

The ancient custom was not observed in one respect only: the head of queen Nefertiti, the earthly mother, was sculptured in the four corners of the granite tomb instead of the head of Isis, the heavenly mother. When the queen heard of this she was indignant and rebelled against the king for the first time in her life. But it was too late to prepare a new tomb.

On the fortieth day after Maki's death the funeral procession started out. The coffin was put into a boat, the boat into a sledge—the carriage of the ancient times when there were no wheels; two pairs of oxen drew it and the runners slowly creaked on the white sand of the desert as it were on snow.

Mourners dressed in blue—the colour of the sky, the colour of death—walked in front, throwing dust over their heads with a wail, monotonous like the howling of jackals.

"Weep, weep, weep, O sisters! Shed tears, shed endless tears! Draw your mistress to the West, oxen, draw her to the West! Poor darling, you were so fond of talking to me, why are you silent now, why don't you speak a word? So many friends you had, and now you are alone, alone, alone! The little feet that walked so fast, the little hands that held so

tight are bound, confined, tied down. Weep, weep, weep, O sisters! shed tears, shed endless tears!"

The sun was setting when they entered the Princesses' Valley, with the yawning openings of the tombs cut in the rocks. Close by an old fig tree was an unfading patch of green against the dead sands and a sweetbriar flowered fragrant with the scent of honey and roses: the secret waters of an underground spring kept them fresh. The drowsy humming of bees sounded like faraway cymbals.

The mummy was placed at the entrance of the tomb and stood against the yawning blackness of the cave, bathed in the last radiance of the setting sun. Two priests, one wearing the mask of the jackal-headed Anubis and the other of the falcon-headed Horus, stood on either side of the mummy, while the officiating priest, *herheb,* performing the sacrament Apra, the opening of lips and eyes, read the magical words from a papyrus:

"Get up, get up, get up, Osiris Makitaton! I, thy son Horus, have come to give thee back thy life, to join thy bones, to bind thy flesh, to put thy limbs together. I am Horus, thy son, who gives birth to his father. Horus opens thy eyes that they may see, thy lips that they may speak, thy ears that they may hear; he strengthens thy legs that they may walk and thy arms that they may work!"

The priest embraced the mummy, brought his face near its face and breathed into its mouth.

"Thy flesh increases, thy blood flows and all thy limbs are whole."

"I am, I am! I live, I live! I shall not know corruption," another priest, hidden behind the mummy, answered as though it were itself speaking.

"Thou art a god among gods, transfigured, indestructible, ruling over other gods," the officiating priest declared.

"I am one. My being is the being of all the gods throughout eternity," the mummy answered and the dead eyes glittered more brightly than the living. "He is—I am; I am—He is."

The king fell on his face: he understood that this new terrible god, Lightgiving, Everlasting, Ancient of days, Makitaton, had overthrown Aton.

He breathed with relief when the body was put back in the coffin and Makitaton became little Maki once more.

He bent over her, kissed her on the mouth and put upon her heart a branch of mimosa: the tender, feathery leaves were to respond with their tremour to the first stir of the heart at resurrection.

The king spent the night in a tent in the desert, waiting for sunrise, to say the morning prayers at the tomb.

He could not go to sleep for hours. At last he got up, lifted the side of the tent and looked out. The Milky Way stretched like a cloud rent in two from one end of the desert to the other, the Pleiades glowed, and the seven stars of Tuart the Hippopotamus glittered with a cold brilliance. Dead stillness was all round; only the jackals' howling and the hooting of owls came from the gorge below.

He lay down again and went to sleep.

He dreamt he was standing on a square platform at the top of Cheops' great pyramid. The desert below was thronged with a countless multitude of men: there seemed to be as many heads as there were grains of sand in the desert; it was as though all tribes and peoples had gathered together for the last judgment on him, Uaenra. They were looking at him and waiting with bated breath.

A puny, black little creature—Shiha, the eunuch, or the god Tot himself, the Wise Monkey—fidgeted by his side. The king wanted to push it away and could not—he felt weak all over.

Suddenly Shiha tore off the king's royal apron, *shenshet,* and began whipping him with a switch on the naked body, saying:

"Here's something for you, Akhnaton Uaenra, Joy of the Sun, Sun's only Son!"

He did not hurt him but whipped him respectfully, as one ought to whip the god-king according to the mad wisdom of the dream; but the more respectful it was, the more shameful.

And the human multitude down below laughed frantically, shaking the earth and the sky with its laughter. The sun in heaven, a red monstrous face, bared its teeth, turning crimson with laughter; it stretched out its long hand-shaped rays and made a long nose at him.

And Shiha went on whipping him and saying:

"Ah, you naughty boy, you shameless little creature, you have disgraced yourself before all the world! Take this, son of man, son of god!"

The king woke up, recalled his dream and felt as

frightened and ashamed in reality as he did in the dream.

He lay for some time in the dark with his eyes open. There was a lump in his throat, his breath failed him as before an epileptic fit; the inhuman scream was ready to burst from his throat. "What shall I do? What shall I do?" he thought with anguish.

Suddenly he felt easier — something had been loosened, the lump in the throat had melted away. He got up and walked out of the tent.

The sky was rose-green and the rose-green waves of the sand seemed as ethereal as the sky. The morning star bright as the sun glittered in the heavens. Not a man, not a beast, not a bird, not a tree, not even a blade of grass—only the sky and the earth—endless freedom, infinite expanse.

Akhnaton raised his eyes to the star and smiled. All at once he seemed to have understood what he was to do.

With joy, as though his words were enough to conquer death—the mocking laughter—he whispered:

"To go away! To go away!"

PART IV

THE SHADOW OF THE ONE TO COME

I

AAKERA came up to Dio, his face so distorted that she hardly knew him.

"The king is waiting for you, go to him," he said, and was about to go when she stopped him.

"What has happened, prince?"

"He will tell you himself, go to him."

"I am keeping watch; I must wait till I am relieved."

"Never mind. I will take your place."

Dio ran up the stairs to the flat roof of Aton's temple.

The day was just dawning. The sky seemed empty and glassy like the open eye of a corpse. The waters of the river looked leaden. The earth was under the spell of sleep. The town below appeared dead. It was the hour when men's sleep is like death as is said in the hymn to Aton:

> Men sleep in darkness like the dead,
> Their heads are wrapped up, their nostrils stopped,
> Stolen are all their things that are under their heads,
> While they know it not.
> Every lion comes forth from his den,
> All serpents creep out of their holes,
> The creator has gone to rest and the world is silent.

The white walls of the temple were dull-green as though under water. All was dead; only on the

great altar of the Sun a perpetual fire was burning and the sun disc of Aton above it—the highest point of the whole huge edifice—glowed with a dull-red glow as though a ray of an invisible sun were reflected in it.

Dio saw the king in the distance, but she did not recognise him at once. He was sitting on the altar steps in a curiously cramped attitude, with his chin resting against his knees and his face buried in his hands. "Sitting on their heels in the dust," she recalled the refrain of the Babylonian song about the dead in the underworld, mournful as the howling of the night wind. He probably did not hear her step, for he did not stir. She did not dare to call him, thinking he was asleep.

Suddenly he raised his head and looked at her in a way that made her heart stand still.

"Ah, Dio! Have you seen Saakera?"

"Yes."

"Has he told you what I wanted to say to you?"

"No."

"Sit down."

She sat down beside him. He took her hand, kissed the palm of it and smiled in a way that wrung her heart again.

"There, now I have forgotten. I remember what I wanted to say, but I can't think how to say it. It must be the fit that has made me so forgetful."

She understood he was referring to the epileptic fit he had had recently.

He stretched himself so that the knuckles of his

fingers cracked, and yawned loudly. Two deep wrinkles formed round his mouth. He looked like the ancient Sphinx with the face of Akhnaton.

"Do you remember my telling you, Dio, that my kingdom was coming to an end? Well, it has come to an end. I want to go away."

"How go away? Where?"

"Anywhere, so long as I go away from here, escape out of this prison. . . . But why do you ask? You know it all better than I do."

"But how are you to go? Will they let you?"

"No one is to know, except you and Saakera. You two will help me. He has already promised."

"Promised what?"

"I will tell you. It was he who killed Maki; she had the child by him. He has just confessed it. He is so wretched that he wants to kill himself and drink the remainder of the poison out of Merira's ring, my present to him. But I have thought of a worse punishment for him: he is to be king when I go away."

"But can he do it?"

"He will be no worse than I am. And it won't be for long: he will hand over the power to Horemheb, the Viceroy of the North. Horemheb refuses to be king so long as I live, but I expect he will agree when I am dead."

"How, when you are dead?"

"When I go away I shall be dead to all. No one will know that I have gone, and those who hear of it will not believe it but will think me dead."

Dio knew that Horemheb was an enemy of Aton's faith. Would the king ruin the work of his whole

life by putting him into power? She wanted to ask the question, but felt she had better not.

"This is how Saakera is going to help me," the king went on. "We shall set out for Memphis together to see Horemheb and on the way I shall go ashore somewhere in the night—and that will be the last they will see of me."

"Will you go alone?"

"Yes. I will take off my royal dress, put on the clothes of a *uab* priest—you know, those that walk about the high roads collecting money for the temples, and go off with a staff and wallet."

"What for? What will you do?"

"What I have done all my life. Do you remember, Iserker said 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight'? Well, I shall be preparing it. I will leave the great and go to the small, leave the first and go to the last; the first have not heard me—perhaps the last will . . . ."

He was saying extraordinary things in a dull, dreary way. He kept yawning; perhaps those who 'sit in the dust on their heels in the underworld' yawn like that, too.

"Well, why are you silent? Do you think I am mad?"

"No, it isn't that . . . ."

"Speak, don't be afraid."

"I think . . . . forgive me, sire, but all you kings are like babies: you don't know what poor, hard life is like. As soon as you have gone you will perish senselessly—of thirst, of hunger, from a wild beast, or a brigand's knife. You will be like a naked child on naked earth . . . ."

"'Be merciful to yourself, Uaenra!' Is that it? Do you remember who said it? My friend, Merira. No, Dio, my Father will not leave me. He who preserves worms and midges of the air will not forsake a man. And what is more terrible—a robber's knife or Tuta's flattery, thirst in the desert or Merira's poison? Isn't this so, Dio the prophetess?"

"It is. But I shall say, like Merira again: can't a king do more good than a beggar?"

He laughed.

"No, you are not Merira. You don't believe what you are saying. I have reigned for many years and much good I have done! Ramose is right: nothing is more vile than empty noble words, nothing more wicked than empty good words. I thought I could make people happy, bring heaven down to earth—and this is the happiness I have bestowed upon them: blood is being shed everywhere between the Delta and the Waterfalls, it is hell upon earth. I wanted to efface the boundaries of the fields, to make the poor equal with the rich, and what has happened is that the whole of Egypt is like a dirty Jews' village where people live and die like cattle in perfect equality! And it is all done by the decree of the king Who-lives-in-Truth—Ankh-em-Maat—a fine name! Iserker wanted to stab me, Merira to poison me, but isn't it doing me too much honour? To spit into the liar's face would be punishment enough. . . . Do you ever have shameful dreams, Dio, so ridiculous that one could die of laughter?"

"Yes, I know."

'Ah, so you have them, too. . . . Well, I have had such a dream—I nearly died of laughter. To laugh

at oneself is death. "I am He," is what I laugh at, what is killing me. Laughter will kill me one day like epilepsy. . . . Dio, Dio, if you love me, save me, help me!"

"How can I help you?"

"Stay with her!"

She understood: with the queen

"Does she know?"

"No."

"How then will you . . . . deceive her?"

"I can't deceive her—she will find out. But if at least it weren't just now, after Maki's death—one wound on the top of another. . . . Later on, when everything is over, you will tell her, you alone will know how to tell her so that she should forgive me. . . ."

"No, she won't forgive, and if she does . . . ."

"I know, you need not tell me! Oh, it would be better if she didn't forgive me! But she is sure to forgive . . . . What am I to do, what am I to do? To stay is to kill myself: to go away is to kill her, to trample upon her heart? . . . Help me, stay with her. Perhaps you will save her. Remember, if she dies I shall die, too."

"You ask me for a miracle?"

"Yes, do a miracle—a miracle of love. You do love her, don't you? Love her to the end. Relieve me of my burden and take it upon yourself. Will you?'

"I will."

She was silent for a while and then asked:

"You will go away and I shall never see you again?"

"Yes, you will; I will call you as soon as I can and we will go to Him together!"

He spoke no more, and raising his knees as before put his chin on them and wept, covering his face with his hands.

She put her arm round his head and pressed it to her bosom, stroking it gently with the other hand.

Shiha, the eunuch, was right: the king did not know how to cry: he swallowed his tears convulsively, choked, trembled as in a shivering fit. But Dio's caress gradually calmed him, and he only shuddered from time to time with a sob like a child tired of crying.

"Perhaps you are right," he began again, "and I shall perish senselessly. Saakera wants to kill himself; perhaps I do also. . . . Dio, my sister, oh if you only could . . . ."

"What is it? Tell me."

"If you could only tell me whether I ought to go away?"

Dio knew that the right answer was "no one but yourself can tell." But she also knew that saying this would mean abandoning him—the naked child upon the naked earth.

She pressed his head to her bosom and said:

"You ought."

The trumpets down below played the hymn to Aton:

> "Glorious is Thy rising in the East
> Lord and giver of life, Aton!"

The dead sky revived and turned rosy. A red ember blazed up in the misty gorge of the Arabian

mountains and the first ray of the sun glittered on Aton's disc.

The king rose, took Dio by the hand and led her up the sloping approach to the great altar of the Sun. He turned to the East, raised his arms and said:

"I come to glorify thy rays, living Aton . . ."

But his voice failed him: he suddenly felt that he could no longer pray to Aton.

He fell on his knees and cried:

"My God, my God, have mercy upon me, a sinner! In thee have I put my trust, let me never be ashamed . . . ."

And with a sob he beat his head against the flagstones:

"Let me never, never be ashamed!"

On the twenty-ninth day of the month of Hoyak, December, on the thirteenth anniversary of the foundation of the City of the Sun and the day of Aton's nativity, the king set out on his journey.

Everyone wondered at his breaking his oath not to leave the domain of Aton, but they did not wonder very much; it was the privilege of a king and a god to release himself from his vows, and besides, many had noticed that his fervour for the new faith had begun to cool. The decree prohibiting the worship of the gods had never been declared after all, and the day of departure was fixed on the very day of the great festival, as though on purpose to cancel it.

The king made no secret of his journey: he was going to Memphis to see Horemheb, the Viceroy

of the North, to persuade him to take Saakera's place as heir to the throne. Sensible people rejoiced: they did not want Saakera for king; there was nothing to be proud of in being ruled by a king who had his ears boxed by his Ethiopian concubine; Horemheb, the husband of the queen's sister, Nezemmut, a direct descendant of the great king Tutmose the Third, had every right to reign; the gods themselves had commanded him to do so. "The gods rocked thy cradle," as it said in the song of Amon's priests. He was a faithful servant of the king and was not implicated in any court or priestly intrigue; but he had not been false to the faith of his fathers, had not worshipped the new god, and the enemies of Aton hoped he would destroy the work of the apostate king and restore the old gods.

Everyone rejoiced except the queen. The parting from her husband frightened her; she had never been parted from him during the fifteen years of their married life. Did she suspect anything? If she did she showed no sign of it, but submitted without a murmur. She did not ask him to take her with him—she knew he would not; and besides she could not leave Rita, who was ill. And she herself was not well: she had a racking cough, was feverish at night and there was an ominous flush in her cheeks.

The king had not been seen so joyful for years as he was on the day of his departure. Only when he took leave of the queen a shadow passed over his face; but he looked at Dio and was happy again.

The crowd on the quay was joyful, too. When

the king's ship set sail, a white falcon, the bird of Horus, circled over it, foretelling a happy journey.

The people stood for some time watching the three ships, magnificently painted and gilded—marvels of gold, purple, and azure, half birds, half flowers—glide along the white water: after the overflow the Nile turns white 'like the milk of Isis.'

Memphis was four hundred *aters* from the City of the Sun, down the river.

The further the king went the happier he was, as though he had, indeed, escaped from prison. It made him happy that the yellow streak of the dead sands and the black of fertile earth stretched on either side of the river simply, quietly and monotonously: life and death side by side in eternal union, eternal peace; that the slow oxen were drawing deep furrows in rich earth and the bright green crops already showed here and there, and the monotonous singing of the ploughman echoed far in the stillness of the fields.

A deserted temple of the Sun, built a thousand years before Akhnaton, stood at the edge of the desert in the middle of a great pyramid cemetery, within four or five hours' journey from Memphis down the river.

A full moon, huge and red-hot, was rising beyond the Arabian Mountains when the king's ship stopped by the temple. The king, Saakera and two priests, with sacred utensils, the bread of offering, wine for libations and incense, came ashore.

The only priest and guardian of the temple, an old man of a hundred years, met them and wept

when he heard that the king wanted to offer a sacrifice: the last person to visit the temple was king Tutmose the Fourth, Akhnaton's grandfather.

They wallked from the harbour to the temple down a long covered passage. On the large flat roof of the temple a huge obelisk, the Sun stone, Ben-ben, stood on a pyramid-shaped base, facing an altar made of five huge blocks of alabaster, exactly like the one in the City of the Sun, on the roof of Aton's temple.

The king burned incense, made the libation and prayed in silence for a few minutes. Then he sent everyone away and walked with Saakera to the secret gates that led into the desert. He gave him a scroll of papyrus—his resignation from the throne, and a letter to Horemheb, in which he implored him to save Egypt and accept the crown.

When Saakera had sworn that all should be done, the king embraced and kissed him on the mouth and, taking off his royal tiara, with a golden snake of the sun, Uta, over the forehead, put it on Saakera's head; he took off all his royal robes, put on the dress of a wandering priest, *uab,* slung a wallet over his shoulder, took a staff in his hand and walked out of the gate.

The full, dazzlingly bright moon stood high in the starless sky. Coal-black shadows fell upon the white sand that sparkled like snow with sapphire sparks, and the black triangles of the pyramids stood out against the sky on the distant horizon.

Saakera watched the king go. He walked as though he had been a wanderer all his life, with a

light quick step, along a faint path—a jackals' track —to the neighbouring fishing village, Ptah-Sokkaris. consisting of some two dozen mud huts.

His figure grew smaller as he walked away; he had been the size of an animal, now he was the size of a bird, a mouse, an ant, a point, and finally he disappeared, melted away in the fire of the moon.

"Strange!" Saakera thought, unconscious of the tears that were trickling down his face. "There is no God, I know there isn't, then why . . . ?"

He broke off and started as though someone else had finished for him:

"There is God, there is! It is because there is God that he has gone away!"

II

HE pyramid cemetery of the ancient kings stretched along the edge of the desert from Memphis to Heliopolis—a three days' journey.

A great battle of men with death had once been fought here; death conquered, men ran away, the field became a desert; only the pyramids remained like fortresses, besieged but not taken.

In the very middle of the cemetery, in the plain of Rostia, the three largest pyramids stood—those of Menkaur, Hafra and Cheops. The many hundredweight blocks of stone over the king's tomb within were packed so close together that a needle could not be thrust between them; outside, the mirror-like facing of sandstone was so perfect that the pyramids looked like huge crystals. The eternal triangles, rising from the earth to one point in the sky, proclaimed to men the mystery of Three: "I began to be as one God, but three Gods were within me."

All the other tombs had been destroyed; the royal mummies had been thrown out and lay about in the sand, turning to dust under the feet of the passers-by. Bats, hyenas and jackals lived in the tombs. Thieves had plundered them for a thousand years, but had not yet succeeded in clearing everything away.

As the blind singers sang at feasts:

"I have heard of what befell my forefathers:
The walls of their tombs are destroyed,
Their coffins are empty like coffins of beggars,
Forsaken by everyone on earth.
Their dwelling-place is no more.
It is as though they had never been.

In a wild rock close by that looked like a lion at rest, the great Sphinx was carved, no one knew by whom and when. Its face was the first human face sculptured in stone. Its names were Ra-Harmahu—the Sun-at-the-edge-of-the-horizon; Khu-Zeshep——Shining Terror, and Kheper—Rising from the Dead.

Perpetually buried by the sand, it lifted its head from under it with a mysterious smile on the flat lips, to see the first ray of the rising sun; and there was the dazzling terror of death and resurrection in its eyes of stone.

Not far from the Sphinx stood a temple built also no one knew when and by whom. The square pillars and rafters of such enormous stones that one could hardly believe them to have been carved by human hands were of black granite; all was smooth, bare and divinely simple.

The temple had not been destroyed and, indeed, there was nothing to destroy in it; but it had fallen into decay like everything around it. The high road from Memphis to Heliopolis went past it and part of the temple had been turned into an inn. The alabaster floors were dirty and the mirror-like granite had turned dull with the smoke of kitchen fires.

One day towards the end of winter shepherds

were keeping the night watch in the field of Rostia; the tombs in the hills close by served as cattle sheds. They lighted a bonfire of manure bricks and straw right at the foot of the Sphinx. The night was cold; the tall grass was white with hoar frost.

Wayfarers who had not been able to obtain shelter at the inn settled by the shepherds' bonfire. Issachar was among them. When King Akhnaton had left the City of the Sun for Memphis, he went after him and, not finding him there, set out in search of him. Issachar's uncle, the merchant Ahiram, who was going with his young daughter-in-law, Tabitha, to the town of Tanis on business, was there, too, and so was Yubra, the former slave of Khnumhotep; wounded in the Nut-Amon rising, he had only just recovered after a long illness.

"Blessed is He who cometh in the name of the Lord," Yubra was saying. "He shall come down like rain upon the freshly cut meadow, like dew upon parched-up earth. He shall save the souls of the humble and the oppressor he shall lay low. . . ."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Merik, a shepherd, with a kind and intelligent face somewhat like that of King Hafra, the pyramid builder, whose effigies stood in the temple by the inn. "Do you mean the new prophet?"

"No, the One of Whom the prophet speaks."

"Prophets prophesy, magpies chatter and it makes no difference to us one way or another," grunted Mermose, a sickly-looking man with a sarcastic smile on his thin lips, a saltworker from the Miuer lakes.

"Very true! Prophets are no use to poor people,"

Anupu, an old peasant, confirmed. Rough and shaggy he looked like a tree-stump dug out of the ground and covered with earth. He had been silent, eating bread soaked in water and wrapping his sheepskin closer round him, but suddenly he grew lively and began talking as though he had recalled something.

"I have dragged the plough myself for forty years—never had any money to buy oxen; and you know how little land we have. And the summer before last part of the bank was washed away during the overflow and a quarter of my field had fallen into the river and the house very nearly went, too. Tax collectors came: 'You are in great arrears, Anupu,' they said, 'sixty bushels of wheat, sixty of spelt and a hundred and seventy of barley.' 'I have nothing at all,' I said, 'have patience with me, fathers!' 'No,' they said, 'the treasury cannot wait, lie down.' And one made a sign behind the other's back to give him a bribe, but I had nothing to do it with. So they laid me out and gave me a flogging, and to my wife, too—she had stood up for me and abused them. And they sent me to clean the canals in Set's salt marshes during the very fierce heat. I had to stand up to my knees in water, devoured by midges, shaking with fever. I still get a shivering fit when the night comes on. And a neighbour told me the other day that my wife is dead, my house has tumbled down, my two sons have been taken for the army, and my daughter has been led astray by some Midian merchants. I have nothing now to return to. . . . And so I say, what is the use of prophets to me?"

Merik added some straw to the bonfire. The flames leapt up, lighting the face of the Sphinx in the black starry sky. Tabitha, with a baby in her arms, was sleeping between the Sphinx's lion paws.

Tabitha means 'gazelle.' She had the eyes of a gazelle, the long, dark eyelashes of a child, and such a smile that Merik's son User, a young man with a sad and girlishly charming face, wanted to cry with happiness at the sight of her. He looked at her as though he were praying: he fancied that she was Mother Isis with the baby Horus and that the Shining Terror fixed its stony eyes into the starlit darkness merely so that it might watch over the Mother and the Babe.

"It goes ill with peasants, but soldiers are no better off," said a thin little old man, rather like a grasshopper—a retired centurion, Aziri. "A soldier climbs up the hills carrying burdens like a donkey, drinks water out of pools like a dog; when he sees the enemy he trembles like a bird in a net; and when he comes home he is covered with wounds, cankered with illness, like an old wormeaten tree; he cannot work and is ashamed to beg—he may as well lie down and die."

He did not say it, but all understood "prophets are no use to a soldier."

"Come, friends, don't be so gloomy," Merik said, looking round at them all with a serene smile. "I have lived in the world for forty years, I have seen much evil, but also a great deal of good. One can't say of a man's life that it is quite good, nor that it is quite bad either; it's all mixed up; to-day is bad, to-morrow will be better."

"No, it won't be better," Mermose retorted. "It is bad now but it will be worse. It is written in the ancient scrolls: 'the Lord will give men a tremulous heart, their eyes shall melt away, their souls shall pine and they shall tremble night and day; in the day they shall say, 'oh, if it were night!' and at night 'oh, if it were day!' The sky over their head shall be brass and the earth under their feet shall be iron and dust shall fall upon them till they all perish.' "

"No, they willl not perish: the Saviour will come and save the perishing," Yubra said, simply and quietly.

"How will he save them, by the sword or by the word?" asked a puny little man, with a spotty face, a sharp red little nose and squinting, shifty eyes. He was a scribe, dismissed from the service, Herihor or Heri, a quarrelsome, debauched and backbiting man, as one could see from his face.

"And what do you think?" Yubra answered evasively: he was afraid of Heri who was said to be a spy.

Heri did not answer at once; he had a pull at his flask and then said, with a wink:

"The sword. Or, if there is no sword at hand, with an axe or a stick. Until we get the rich by the throat and give their fat bellies a shake, they won't give back what they have plundered. . . . But it's enough babbling, we must act!"

"How?"

"Raise a cry throughout the world, 'rise up, rebel, paupers, kill, plunder, burn!' A great fire will be kindled and a thing that has never been will hap-

pen; beggars will be as gods and then the earth will turn upside down like a potter's wheel!"

"You should not say such things, my son!" Ahiram stopped him. "You must not rail against the rulers even in your thoughts, nor speak evil against the rich in your own chamber, for a bird of the air may carry your words."

"A-ah, you are afraid? Well, then it's no use talking," Heri laughed and he drained the last drop out of his flask.

"But who are you, where do you come from?" Yubra asked with sudden alarm.

"And who are you and your prophet? Tramps, I expect, runaway slaves, rogues, game for the gallows, we have seen enough of such, ugh!"

He paused, looking round at them all with sleepy but still cunning eyes, and then spoke amiably again.

"Come, dear old man, don't be cross, let us kiss! Ah, mates, I am sorry for you! You are poor, ignorant people, anyone can injure you and there's no one to stand up for you. And I am so fond of poor people—I am ready to lay down my life for them!"

And suddenly bending down to Yubra, he whispered in his ear: "Do you know Kiki the Noseless? He is a man of sense, cleverer than any prophet. They say he is stirring things up again on the Upper Nile! That's the man to join! Shall I take you to him?"

Yubra said nothing, and drew back. All were silent, as though they really were afraid to speak.

Far away in the desert the hungry roar of a

lion was heard suddenly, and the dogs by the sheepfold barked and howled frantically.

Merik rose and thanking his guests for their conversation with stately courtesy typical of the men of the desert, went with two shepherds on his watch round. The others began to settle down for the night on the warm sand by the bonfire, wrapping themselves in furs and cloaks.

Issachar went up to Yubra and said, taking him aside:

"May I see the prophet?"

"Why not? Everyone will see him to-morrow."

Isaachar paused and, looking round to see if any one was listening, asked in a whisper:

"Who is he, where does he come from?"

"A *uab* priest, but where he comes from I do not know."

"You really don't know or don't want to tell me?"

"No, I really don't know."

"And what is his name?"

"Neser-Bata."

Issachar knew that Bata was one of the names of Osiris: the Soul of Bread, of God's flesh broken and eaten by men; and Neser meant offspring, Son. Neser Bata—Son of Osiris, second Osiris.

"Are you an Israelite?" Yubra asked.

"Yes."

"Your Moses is a great prophet, but this one is greater than he."

"Only one Man on earth will be greater than Moses—do you know Who?"

"I know."

Issachar looked at Yubra as though wishing to ask something else.

"You will see for yourself and know," Yubra said in answer to that silent question, and walked away.

Issachar lay down by the bonfire, wrapping his cloak round him, but could not go to sleep for thinking about the prophet. There was something in Yubra's words and reservations that suggested the mysterious smile of Khu-Zeshep, the Shining Terror. He dropped asleep just before daybreak; he vaguely heard the distant roar of the lion and remembered the voice crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.'

Merik's son, too, could not go to sleep that night: he kept looking as though in prayer at the mother with the child asleep between the lion paws of the Sphinx.

Tabitha's ass dozed, hanging its head. The flame of the dying fire seemed to stand like a fine and sharp sword in the still air. From the low-lying meadows down by the river came the melancholy call of the hoopoo. The stars grew dim and twinkled like flames blown out by the wind. The sky turned white and rosy and there glowed in it a star, pure and dazzling like the sun. A red-hot ember blazed up in the misty gorge of the Arabian Mountains and the first ray of the sun lighted the Sphinx's face.

The baby woke up and cried. The mother gave him the breast. Then she held him up, showing him the sun. The boy laughed and stretched out his arms as though he would seize the sun.

The same mystery was in the smile of the baby

as in the smile of the Sphinx. User fell on his face and worshipped Baby Horus—the Shining Terror.

Issachar woke up when the sun had already risen above the palm trees. He jumped up, afraid of having slept too late and missed the prophet.

Some people were hurrying past him.

"Where are you going?" he asked them.

"To Ieket-Chufu, to hear the prophet," they answered.

He followed them. Walking ankle-deep in sand along a track between sharp, projecting rocks, they climbed on to the flat top of the hill Ieket-Chufu, facing the Great Pyramid of the same name. In the shadow the grass was still white with hoar-frost, but in the sun it had melted and fell in drops clear and bright as tears.

The expanse seen from the top of the hill was boundless: sands, yellow as the lion's hair, stretching to the edge of the horizon; bluish-green meadows and palm groves by the river; golden points of the Heliopolis obelisks, sparkling against the bare parched rocks of the Arabian hills purple as amethyst and yellow as topaz; and close by, opposite the hill, the huge pale phantom of Cheops' pyramid glimmering in the rosy sunlit mist. The perfect triangles rising from the earth to one point in the sky proclaimed to men the mystery of Three: "I began to be as one God but three Gods were in me."

The people crowding on the flat top of the hill

surrounded the prophet so closely that Issachar could not squeeze his way to him. The lame, the halt, the dumb, the blind were among the crowd, as well as lepers, paralytics and men possessed by the devil. Neser-Bata laid his hands upon them with prayer and they were healed. Then he stood on a hillock in the middle of the plateau. The sun rising behind him surrounded the prophet with dazzling brilliance that seemed to come from his body. Issachar could not see his face. "Thy flesh is the flesh of the Sun; thy limbs are beautiful rays. In truth thou dost proceed from the Sun as the child from its mother's womb," he recalled the words of the service to Aton.

The prophet's voice was heard and the crowd grew so still that one could hear the drops of melting hoar-frost falling to the ground. The sound of that voice was so familiar that Issachar's heart throbbed with an incredible presentiment. He looked down: he was afraid of seeing and recognizing him.

Neser-Bata was speaking of the second Osiris, of the Son who was to come, of Him Whom the prophets of Israel called the Messiah.

Issachar raised his eyes, saw and recognized: "it is he!" and covered his face with his hands as though blinded by the sun. Yet he did not believe his eyes and looked once more, but by that time the prophet had gone down from the hillock and could not be seen for the crowd.

Issachar went up to Yubra and said:

"I want to speak to Neser-Bata,"

"Go down to Khu-Zeshep, he will walk past there," Yubra answered.

Issachar walked down the hill and sat down on the sand at the foot of the Sphinx.

The sun was rising and the black shadow of the great pyramid slowly moved along the white sand like the shadow on a sundial measuring out minutes and ages, the passage of time and eternity. "How many minutes—how many ages will it be till He comes?" Issachar thought.

He suddenly saw Neser-Bata coming towards him down the hill. He went to meet him, fell at his feet and cried:

"Rejoice, Akhnaton, King of Egypt!"

He gazed into his face still unable to believe his eyes; he recognized him and yet he did not.

The prophet looked at him in silence and said, shaking his head:

"No, my son, you are mistaken, I am a beggar and a wanderer, Bata. And who are you?"

"Issachar, son of Hamuel, the one who wanted to kill you. Don't you know me?"

Suddenly Bata bent quickly down to him and whispered:

"If you love me, don't tell!"

And he looked into his eyes. There was such power in that look that had he said "die!" Issachar would have died.

But when Bata turned to go he embraced his feet and asked:

"May I follow you?"

"No, you may not. Go your way and I shall go mine: we shall both come to Him and meet there."

"To Him? But aren't you . . . . ?"

He gazed into his face once more, terror-stricken:

it suddenly seemed to him that this was neither the beggar Bata, nor the king of Egypt, Akhnaton, but Someone else.

"Who are you? Who are you? I adjure you by the living God, who are you?" he whispered desperately.

The prophet shook his head and smiling pointed to the black shadow on the white sand.

"Do you see my shadow? As this shadow is from me, I am from Him. He comes after me but I am not He!"

He said it and walked along the foot of the Sphinx, followed by his shadow. He turned the corner and disappeared, and the shadow disappeared too. Only the light footprints were left on the white sand.

Issachar bent down and not daring to kiss them kissed the sand where the shadow had passed.

III

THERE was a riot in Busiris, a town in the Northern district.

As usual it was started by the Israelites working in the brick factories when they were no longer given any chopped straw necessary for making bricks, but were ordered to chop it themselves, while producing the usual quantity of bricks. Porters and loaders from the harbour joined them when they heard that boys younger than fifteen were to be taken for the army. The mothers said indignantly, "What is the good of bearing sons? They are no sooner grown up than they are driven to the slaughter, and you, their fathers, put up with it!" Part of the garrison of Kidjevadan mercenaries, who had received in their monthly ration nasty smelling sesame oil instead of olive oil for ointment, also joined the rioters.

Usirmar, son of Ziamon, the governor of the province of Busiris and an old soldier of the times of Tutmose the Fourth, sternly put down the rebellion. With a number of other rioters the tramp Bata, the slave Yubra and the Jew Avinoam—this was the assumed name of Issachar—denounced by the scribe Herihor, were seized as the chief culprits.

"This accursed Bata," so the denunciation ran, "a godless and seditious fellow, having gathered a band

of thieves and brigands like himself, intended to cause rebellion not only in the Busiris province, but throughout Egypt, preaching that people should not obey the authorities and that they should refuse to serve in the army, that the poor ought to be equal to the rich, saying that the boundaries between fields should be effaced and the land be common property, and wealth taken from the rich and given to the poor. The said accursed man blasphemes against the gracious god-king and says in his vain talk that there is only one King in heaven and on earth—the god Ra-Aton."

The denunciation was illiterate but cleverly put together. It was a troubled time. Horemheb, the governor of the North, had just set out to the eastern province, Goshen, to put down a rising of the Israelites who were always dreaming of a second Exodus, and to repulse the attack of the Sinai nomads against the Great Wall of Egypt. Terrible rumours reached Usirmar of King Akhnaton's madness, suicide, or assassination, of a new rising in Thebes and an imminent war between the two rivals for the throne, Saakera and Tutankhaton.

The riotous band of the false prophet, Bata, might be the first spark of a new conflagration.

When Bata had been brought in fetters from the prison to the governor's white house, Usirmar ordered everyone out of the room and looked at him with surprise: he was so unlike a criminal. Usirmar had seen King Akhnaton only once, some twenty years ago, and would not have have known him now.

"What is your name?" he asked the prisoner.

"Bata."

"Whose son are you?"

"God's."

"Are you joking? Take care."

"No, I am not joking. I do not know my earthly father; I know only the Heavenly."

"Who are you, where do you come from?"

"You see, I am a tramp. I walk about all over the country but I do not remember where I come from."

"Is it true that you incite the mob to rebellion and want to make the poor equal to the rich?"

"No, it is not true. Rebellion is an evil thing, and I want what is good."

"Why then don't you honour our gracious god-king?"

"I do honour the king, but the king is not God; only one Man on earth shall be God."

"What man?"

"Men call him Osiris, but they do not know his real name."

"Do you know it?"

"No, I don't know it either."

"And will *He* be like you?"

"No, the sun is not like the shadow."

"Is it he then who will make the rich and the poor equal?"

"He, He alone and no one but He! You have said it well, my brother."

"I am not a brother to you, but a judge. Don't you know that I have the power to put you to death or to pardon you?"

"Whether you put me to death or pardon me, either will be a welcome gift to me," Bata answered

with such a serene smile that Usimar marvelled more than ever and thought 'Poor crazy creature, one can't be angry with him.'

He asked him many more questions, but could not discover anything. Usirmar was a just and intelligent man: he understood that the denunciation was for the most part untrue and wanted to pardon the unfortunate prisoner, but could not do so legally; he gave him a light sentence, however; a light corporal punishment and then three years labour in the Nubian gold mines.

The sentence was carried out. With a number of other convicts Bata was sent in a large flat-bottomed barge, a floating prison, up the Nile to the distant Elephant City, Ieb, in the South. A caravan route went from Ieb through the terrible desert of Kush. There in the mining wells in the burning hot depths of the earth old and young men, women and children, with chains on their naked bodies, worked day and night under the overseer's whip, grinding quartz on hand mills, washing gold sand, and dying like flies of heat and thirst.

Issachar had escaped out of prison before the trial. The cunning sons of Israel bribed the gaolers and helped him to run away. Yubra escaped with him. They hired from a fisherman a sailing boat, old and damaged but swift, and sailed up the Nile following the prison barge at a distance.

They overtook and passed it by the City of the Sun. Issachar went ashore, found the chief of the guards, Mahu, and told him that Akhnaton, King of Egypt, was on the barge that was approaching the city.

Knowing something about the king's sudden disappearance, Mahu was not very much surprised, but he did not believe Issachar at once. Detaining him, he promised to reward him if his words proved to be true and, if not, to put him to death; he gave orders to stop the barge and at nightfall went to the harbour with fifty black soldiers on whose loyalty he could rely. Going on board he called the chief gaoler and ordered him to bring the prisoner called Bata; he took Bata into a deck cabin, shut the doors and windows and bringing a lamp close to his face recognised King Akhnaton.

"We guards are used to all sorts of things," Mahu used to tell afterwards. "We have seen so much that our hearts are like stone. But at that moment my heart melted like wax!"

It would have been terrible to him to see a wretched madman instead of King Akhnaton, Joy of the Sun; but it was more terrible to find before him a happy and rational man.

"Life, strength and health to the king," he began, but his voice failed him, his knees gave way under him and, falling at the king's feet, he wept.

The king bent down and said, putting his arms round him:

"There, Mahu, don't cry. I am happy here. . . ."

And added, after a pause:

"I am better here than at home."

Mahu was still looking intently at him, hoping to see a madman; but the king certainly was not mad, and, all at once, Mahu felt as though he himself were going out of his mind.

"What are you saying, what are you saying, sire?

You are better here among thieves and murderers than among your faithful servants?"

"Yes, Mahu. My brother, do you love me? I know you love me. Do then what I ask you: tell no one about me and let me go."

"God knows, Uaenra, I would gladly give my soul for you, but it is easier for me to kill you than leave you here."

"You will kill me if you don't leave me," the king said, and again he bent down and, putting both arms round Mahu's head, looked into his eyes with entreaty.

Mahu said afterwards that in another minute he would have broken down, lost his reason and gone, leaving the king behind. But Akhnaton had pity on him.

"You cannot?" he whispered as though lost in thought, looking at Mahu so that his heart again melted like wax. "Well, there is nothing for it then, let us go!"

They went from the cabin on to the deck. The king stepped into a litter. The soldiers lifted it and carried him to the palace.

IV

Dio woke up, opened her eyes and saw that the dull gold of the palm leaves on the capitals was turning silver in the bluish light of the morning, while the flickering flame of the night-light still threw a reddish reflection on the pale green, pointed leaves at the bottom of the columns; in the middle, where the disc of the god Aton was spreading its hand-shaped rays over the royal couple, the two lights merged in one.

Dio lay on a panther skin spread on the floor between two beds; the queen slept in one, but the king's bed was empty. Dio raised her head and looked at the sleeper: she slept quietly, breathed evenly; only at times the fine brows twitched like a butterfly's antennae and the wrinkle between them grew deeper, as though she were thinking hard even in her sleep; the pale face with the black shadow of the long lashes was beautiful in spite of the ravages wrought by disease.

Dio looked at the queen and it seemed to her it was he and not she: the sister-wife was strikingly like her brother-husband, especially in sleep.

Her hand, transparently pale with the blue veins standing out, hung over the edge of the bed. Dio

touched it with her lips as lightly as the night wind and again it seemed to her it was not her hand but his.

"The two are one," she thought. "How could they have parted? How could he have left her? What will become of her, what will become of him?"

He had told the queen before his departure that he was going to Horemheb, the Viceroy of the North, to persuade him to accept the throne. The queen had always dreamed of resigning the throne and being free from the heavy yoke of sovereignty. She was glad and believed him, though not quite; she was surprised at his not taking her with him: for so many years they had hardly ever parted for a single day, and now in those dreadful weeks after Maki's death he left her, ran away as it were. She felt he was concealing something from her. She soon learned that he had never arrived at Memphis and no one knew or wanted to tell her where he was. She asked Dio, but she did not know either, or did not want to tell. Dio said nothing for days, but at last, seeing that the torture of uncertainty was worse than anything for the queen, she told her.

The queen listened to her calmly, as though she had been prepared for it; she had submitted to him in everything and she submitted to this, also. But she still failed to understand why he had not taken her with him. Together in happiness but apart in sorrow: so then he did not love her as much as she loved him? But for this, too, she blamed herself: she evidently had not known how to love; had she loved him more this would not have happened.

That same day she took to her bed and did not

get up any more. The heart disease she had had for years grew very much worse.

Dio never left her for a moment: she remembered her promise to the king. But she sometimes fancied that her love was worse than hatred. She acted like a skilled torturer who preserves his victim's life, inflicting wounds and then healing them to prolong the torture. She deceived the queen from day to day, telling her that they were looking for the king, would soon find him, had already traced him; but each deception was found out and the torture grew worse.

Sometimes she felt indignant on her account: "What has he done to her! He did not want to kill the victim with his own hands—he ran away; he took a light burden upon himself and put upon her a burden no human being can bear."

That night the invalid had a terrible heart attack. The physician, Pentu, thought she would not survive it. The pang in her breast was so severe that she turned blue as though she had been strangled. No drugs were of any help. Finally Pentu decided to try, as the last resort a very powerful and dangerous remedy—the stupefying juice of Kidjevan belladonna, Lybian sylphium, Arabian myrrh and poppy juice with powdered turqoise and bones of the sacred ibis.

The remedy helped: the invalid dropped asleep. Would she wake? "Oh, if only . . . ." Dio thought and broke off, remembering the king's words, "if she dies, I will die with her." She knew this would be so.

The curtain on the door moved. Dio turned round

and saw that Pentu had thrust his head in. She got up and went to speak to him behind the door in the covered passage leading to the river.

The early morning sky, grey as though covered with clouds, reminded her of the winter days when wet snow fell on Mount Ida. But the sun would rise and the sky would be as blue and cloudless as ever. White mist coiled like smoke over the low-lying meadows beyond the river, a water-bird among the reeds was calling in a creaking voice, and as though in answer to it the wheel of a well creaked somewhere in the distance. There was a smell of bitter smoke and winter freshness.

Pentu took Dio by the hand, led her away from the door and whispered in her ear.

"The king has come back . . . ."

"Where is he?" Dio cried.

Pentu silenced her with a gesture.

"Sh-sh! She may hear. We must prepare her; if she heard suddenly it would be fatal . . . ."

"Where is he?" Dio repeated in a whisper.

Pentu pointed to the door at the end of the passage. Dio rushed towards it, but stopped and put her hands to her head.

"Oh, Pentu, how are we to tell her? I cannot, you had better do it."

"No, Dio, you, no one but you!"

"Where did he come from? How did they find him?"

"Mahu brought him, but I don't know where from."

"Have you seen him?"

"I have."

"Well, how is he, what does he look like?"

"Better not ask. Such a thing hasn't happened since the days of the god Ra! In rags, unwashed, unshaved, bristles on his face, thin, black with sunburn and, dreadful to say, scars on his back. But, thanks to Mahu, no one except us knows anything about it—he has managed it all splendidly! We washed, shaved and dressed him . . . ."

He stopped, as though lost in thought and then turned to Dio again.

"Well, why do you stand still? Go to her and I will keep watch here. When the king heard she was ill he rushed to her and we had difficulty to hold him back. . . . Go, don't be afraid. God willing, everything will come right!"

Dio returned to the bedroom. The queen was lying with her eyes open. She looked at Dio intently.

"Where have you been?"

"Just by the door."

"Whom were you talking to?"

"To Pentu."

"What about?"

"About the king. Good news . . . ."

"Oh, yes, they are looking for him, they will soon find him. They have traced him already. Oh, Dio, aren't you tired of it? It's a mean, silly game! You know I was thinking last night that if I loved him more I wouldn't suffer as I do. He is not a child and not insane—he knows what he is doing. He has gone away—very well, it means it's better for him it should be so. Dio, my dear, my sister, he loves you. Be with him, love him to the end,

don't forsake him; if need be, die with him. But don't lie any more . . . ."

She raised herself on her elbow and looked at Dio still more intently.

"What is the matter with you? Why do you tremble?"

"I am afraid. I kept telling you lies and now when I must tell the truth I don't know how to do it. Do you know what Pentu and I were talking of just now? Of how best prepare you for joy . . . ."

"What am I saying, good Lord!" she thought with terror, but could not stop herself, it was like rolling headlong downhill.

"What joy?" the queen whispered, and she too began to tremble.

"Why, a messenger whom Mahu had sent to Memphis has just returned; he had seen the king in two days' journey from here: the king knows you are ill and is coming home. He may be here tomorrow evening. If you don't believe me, ask Mahu . . . ."

Watching the change in the queen's face, Dio felt that she had found the right way, and, fearing no longer, led her with a firm hand by the very edge of the abyss; and she might have led her through safely and saved her. But suddenly a cry was heard, distant at first and then nearer and nearer; someone was running and shouting. A door banged close by. Dio recognized the voice of Princess Meritatona, who though still weak after her illness, was no longer confined to her bed. She must have heard of the king's return and was running to him shouting: "Abby! Abby! Abby!"

With a low exclamation the queen jumped off the bed and ran to the door. Dio held her back, but she struggled, crying:

"Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!"

She wrenched herself free, rushed through the door, pushed Pentu away, and ran towards the door at the end of the covered passage; having guessed the direction from Rita's voice. But after taking a few steps she fell on her knees and stretching out her arms cried "Enra!" in such a voice that an old fisherman mending his net in a boat some distance down the river heard it and wondered "who can be screaming in the palace as though they were being murdered?"

A door at the end of the passage was flung open and, running out of it, the king rushed to the queen who lay on the floor.

Kneeling down he bent over her and lifted her up, passing one arm round her waist, and supporting her head with the other. He looked into her face. With a low moan she opened her eyes and looked at him with a blissful smile, repeating:

"It's you! It's you!"

Suddenly she trembled all over and struggled like a fish on a hook. Her head was thrown back and he felt her body growing heavy. He laid her on the floor and, bending down, kissed her on the lips, receiving her last breath in that kiss.

That same evening the queen's body lay on the bed in her chamber and all except the king and Dio were weeping over her.

"I am thy sister who loved thee on earth,
No one has loved thee more than I."

Dio recalled the wail of Isis.

The king took her by the hand and said, leading her aside, "It's a good thing you don't cry."

Dio made no answer and only gazed at him.

"We mustn't cry," he went on, with a quiet, fearful smile. "It is better so."

"Better?"

"Yes, better. Now we are free. Let us go to Him together. Will you?"

"No!" she wanted to cry out, but looking at him she suddenly grasped that it was not he who was speaking. And it was not to him she replied with a smile as quiet and fearful as his own:

"Let us go!"

V

AM the prisoner and you the gaoler, isn't it so, Ramose?"

"No, sire, it isn't. You are my king and I am your slave . . . . Why do you laugh?"

"It is no use crying over sour milk, as Ay says. The thing is done, the bird is caught. There are sentries at every door: they bow down to the ground, but they don't let me pass—they cross their spears. And so this means you are my slave?"

"The guards are there to protect you, sire. You know yourself, hired assassins, sent by Tuta, are all over the city. You remember Iserker's knife and Merira's poison? Of course I must protect you! You are laughing again?"

"Forgive me, my friend. You are no good at lies: Ramose lying is like a hippopotamus catching a flea! It isn't from assassins but from myself you are trying to protect me. Be frank, tell me what do you want of me?"

"I have told you many times, Uaenra: you are king—so be a king . . . ."

"I am no longer king: I have resigned the throne."

"A king cannot resign when he has no heir. And Saakera is dead . . . ."

"Yes, my dear brother! Tell me how he died."

"He fell on the battlefield like a hero. He led the army of the god Ra against Tuta's rabble; when our men lost heart he rushed forward and drew them all after him with his battle cry—do you know which? 'Sun's Joy, Uaenra!' He had a spear wound in the stomach and suffered for hours. He had lived without God, but he died a believer. 'There is God, there is,' he kept repeating before his death, and he spoke of you—he was happy to be dying for you . . . ."

"You were wounded in the same battle?"

"It's a mere scratch, not a wound. But many brave men have given their lives for you, sire . . . ."

He paused gloomily.

"And do you know who has Amon's ring with poison, your present to Saakera?" he spoke again, smiling. "Merira. No sooner had Saakera breathed his last than Merira sent envoys to me begging for the ring in exchange for twenty war chariots and ten prisoners."

"Did you give it?"

"No, I refused. But the ring was stolen all the same, by his men, I expect. Let him keep it—poison suits the snake. He had poured out half into your cup but the other is left for himself. Perhaps there will be enough for Tuta as well!"

He went on talking at length about the war and rebellion, imploring the king to show himself to the people, so as to deprive Tuta of his chief weapon—the belief that the king was dead and he, Tuta, was the only legitimate heir to the throne. But the king no longer listened, he paced rapidly up and down the covered passage leading to the river, the very

one in which the queen had died a fortnight before.

Ramose was sitting in an armchair; he did not like to sit in the king's presence, but Akhnaton pressed him to do so, knowing that he had difficulty in standing because of the wound in his leg.

Big clouds, white and round, were reflected in the smooth surface of the river that had entered its banks for the winter, and boats, with outspread sails flitted like birds over the clouds. An amber ray of the afternoon sun fell upon an old painting on the inner wall of the passage: a girl of twelve was giving a boy of thirteen a half-open tulip to smell; there was the timid languor of love in their graceful, as it were dancing, movements, and in their childish faces a sadness that was not childish. It was a portrait of the king and queen in their youth.

The king looked with strangely insensible surprise at the little girl, thinking that at that very moment her dead body was twisting and turning, like the burning bark of a tree, in the heavy resinous perfumes of the embalmers. He recalled his own saying that 'a corpse is worse than dung,' and began to tremble with quiet laughter, that ran down his body like shivers or like crackling sparks in a fur that is being smoothed with the palm.

Tired of walking he sat down in an armchair next to a small chess table that stood between him and Ramose. A knife lay on the table. The king took it out of its sheath and looked at the silver pattern on the bronze blade—lions hunting antelopes among the reeds.

"Whose knife is it?" Ramose asked.

"I don't know," the king answered. "See how fine

and flexible it is—a Keftian 'willow leaf.' It must be Dio's . . . . What do you think, my friend, is a knife dangerous in a madman's hands?"

"You keep joking, sire, and I am in no mood for jokes."

"Joking? No, not quite. I sometimes fancy . . . ."

He broke off. Shivers again ran up and down his body like crackling sparks in a fur.

"Well, what are we to do about an heir, Ramose? You say there is not one, and I say there are two: Horemheb and Tuta—choose whichever you like."

"Horemheb will not accept the crown while you live, and Tuta is a thief, a murderer, a low born cur . . . ."

His breath failed him; turning purple and shaking with fury, he brought out:

"Tuta—king of Egypt? No, sire, this shall not be so long as I live."

He got up.

"Are you going?" the king asked, getting up, too.

"I am going; there is nothing more to say."

"Wait. There was something else I wanted . . . . Yes, I know. Do what you think best, it is all the same to me, choose whom you like, only let me go. I cannot bear it any longer . . . ."

His lips trembled, his face twitched like that of a child ready to burst into tears and, before Ramose had time to think, the king fell on his knees before him.

"Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!" he wept, wringing his hands.

If the earth had given way under his feet or

the sky had fallen upon him, Ramose would have been less horror-stricken.

He quickly bent down to the king, lifted him up, put him in a chair and himself fell at his feet:

"My king, my god, Sun's Joy, Sun's only Son, all shall be as you wish!"

But the king was no longer listening; he had turned away and was staring before him with fixed, wide-open eyes.

"What is it, sire?" Ramose said gently touching his hand.

The king started, slowly turned to him and looking straight into his eyes said with a quiet smile:

"Do you know, Ramose, when they were beating me with sticks in the Busiris court it was less shameful than this."

He rose and taking the knife walked towards the door. Ramose rushed after him.

The king turned round and shouted: "Let me go! Let me go!"

Freeing his hand he threatened Ramose with the knife, but at the same moment, with a terrible scream, fell on the floor at his feet, struggling in a fit of epilepsy.

Ramose was a courageous man, and he had seen men in a fit more than once. He knew that in the 'sacred illness' men are possessed by god; but he could never decide whether the king was possessed by god or the devil, and only now as he looked at him he decided it was by the devil.

"Help! Help!" he cried, running away as though driven by an unearthly terror.

VI

s many were astonied at Him, His visage was so marred more than any man and his form more than the sons of men." Dio recalled Issachar's prophecy when she looked at the king in his illness.

The first fit was followed by a second and a third one, the worst that he had ever had. Pentu, the physician, was afraid he would not live. He did live, but it was no joy either to himself or to others: it was terrible to see the soul dying in a living body.

The days and hours, however, were not all alike. Sometimes as though waking from deep sleep or a swoon, he understood everything and spoke so rationally that those around him had hopes of his complete recovery. But then his mind was clouded again. He sat for hours on the floor in some dark corner with his back to the wall and his legs stretched out, looking into vacancy with eyes dim as a newborn baby's; or slowly swaying his body to and fro, he muttered something under his breath rapidly and inarticulately as in delirium, laughing quietly, or crying, or humming a song. Or he repeated one and the same word over and over again with meaningless persistence. But sometimes there was an obscure meaning in these repetitions.

"Aton-Amon, Aton-Amon, Aton-Amon," he kept repeating one day, making one word of the two, as though on purpose: he had devoted his whole life to dividing them and now he seemed to have understood that it had not been worth while.

Or he asked himself with perplexity, as though he had forgotten and were trying to remember:

"Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?"

And suddenly, turning to Dio, said with a perfect understanding of what he was saying:

"Oh, if I only knew who I am, I should be saved!"

He often had visions of his mother Tiy, of his wife, Nefertiti, of his daughter, Maki, and spoke to them as though they were living.

He had a vision of Shiha, the eunuch, too: standing by his side on the top of a pyramid, he heard the laughter of innumerable crowds down below, saw the face of Aton the Sun red with laughter in the sky and covering his face with his hands repeated:

"Shame! Shame! Shame!"

But when a flash of consciousness lighted the darkness of his clouded mind, he was wise once more—wiser than he had ever been.

At first Dio rejoiced at these lucid intervals, but she came to fear them: after them the darkness was even more terrible; he suffered acutely each time that madness closed in upon him.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" he cried out one day, repeating an old Babylonian psalm.

And suddenly Dio felt in a way she had never done before that it was He Himself, the Son Who was to come. She was terrified at the thought, but

the memory of it remained in her soul like a trace of lightning.

They moved the king to the Maru-Aton palace where Princess Makitatona had died four months before.

It was a three-storeyed building, high like a tower; the bottom was of brick, the top, light and airy, of cedar and cypress wood, trellis-worked, gilded and painted like a jewel casket. On hot days drops of resin trickled down the match-boarded walls and the palace was fragrant like a censer.

The flat roof had a carved railing all round it—a row of Sun-serpents, with gold sun-discs on their heads, their throats dilated with poison. A fire was perpetually burning upon an altar on the roof and, on an alabaster column in front of it, the sun disc of the god Aton made of *cham,* a mixture of gold and silver, glittered in the sky like another sun.

As soon as the king felt better he went up on the roof to pray.

On the tenth day of his illness there was such an improvement in his health that Dio began to hope again.

He went up to the roof in the evening, himself chopped some sandalwood and put it on the altar, and when a white pillar of smoke rose in the still air he knelt down, and stretching his arms to the hand-shaped rays of Aton's sun began to pray. Standing beside him, Dio heard the words of an ancient Babylonian psalm:

"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O

Lord! Hear my voice, let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication and enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified. The enemy has persecuted my soul, has smitten my life down to the ground, has made me to dwell in darkness as those that have been long dead. My spirit is overwhelmed within me, my heart within me is desolate. I stretch forth my hands unto Thee; my soul thirsteth after Thee as a thirsty land. Hear me speedily, O Lord, for I am Thy son!"

The sun had set behind the Lybian hills and in the afterglow the sky seemed covered with feathers of fire; the green of the palm groves had turned blue and the mirror-like surface of the water, almost invisible, like another sky, reflected exquisite opalescent shades of white, blue, green, yellow and rose.

The day had not yet died in the west but the night was already being born in the east: there, in a violet velvety sky, a full moon was glowing, yellow as though filled with honey.

When he had finished his prayer, the king rose, looked round and said:

"How lovely it is, O Lord!"

Tears trembled in his voice. Dio knew they were tears of joy and yet she looked at him anxiously. He smiled at her and gently drawing her towards him put his cheek against hers, as he often did, with a childish tenderness.

"Ma, Ma, how lovely it is! Don't be afraid, I am not raving, I know you are not Ma."

Ma was the Cretan goddess, the Great Mother of gods and men.

And he added, after a pause:

"You and Nefertiti and Tiy, all three of you are One. . . . Don't be afraid, all shall be well, I will recover . . . And if I don't, never mind, it will be well, too: even in my madness I will praise reason, the sun of suns!"

He sat down in a chair and Dio on the ground at his feet. Gently stroking her hair, he said:

"Yes, maybe I shall die in my madness; I shall be cursed, rejected, mocked by men. 'Ah, you silly, you have disgraced yourself before all the world,' as Shiha, the eunuch, says. And yet, I have been the first to see Him Who is to come! The first ray of sunshine is on the top of the pyramid while the rest of the earth is still in darkness: this is how His light rests upon me . . . Why are you crying, Dio? Are you afraid that He will not come?"

"No, I am not afraid, I know He will come. If you have, so will He . . . . But when, when? Men have waited for him for centuries and may have to wait for centuries more! And when He does come, it will not be for us . . . ."

"Yes, for us, too. Do you remember, I said to you 'Let us go to Him'? And now I say we shall not go to Him, but He will come to us!"

And suddenly he began muttering, as though in delirium:

"Soon! Soon! Soon!"

VII

UTANKHATON'S troops were approaching the City of the Sun.

Tuta had proclaimed throughout Egypt that King Akhnaton and the heir-apparent, Saakera, had been killed by the traitor Ramose and that he, Tuta, henceforth the only legitimate heir to the throne, was going to put the regicides to death. Troops loyal to Ramose met the rebels at the southern frontier of Aton's province. The issue of the battle was doubtful. The rebels retreated, but so did Ramose. The old leader understood that his cause was lost; his soldiers were dispirited; disturbed by rumours from the enemy camp, they did not know with whom and for whose sake they were fighting or who the real rebel was—Tuta or Ramose. The only way to silence these rumours was for the king to show himself to the troops; but Ramose had hardly any hope of this left.

All the same he retreated towards Akhetaton, so as to give the final battle in the presence of the king. "Perhaps he will think better of it and refuse to give up his kingdom to Tuta, the thief," Ramose thought.

But there was unrest in the city, too. Robber bands of Tuta's followers had stopped the supply of

corn to Akhetaton. There were hunger riots, first among the prisoners of war and hired labourers, numbers of whom had been employed in building the new capital, then among the troops left for the defence of the city and, finally, in the Jews' Settlement.

Ramose came to Akhetaton on the first day of the riots but did not venture to enter the town with his untrustworthy troops, and Tuta, who was following him, overstepped the holy boundary of Aton's province.

About one o'clock in the morning, Mahu galloped up from the city to the royal gardens of Maru Aton, bringing nine war chariots, and gave orders to place the best detachments of the palace guards so as to defend Maru Aton from a double attack of Tuta's army and rebels from the city.

"Where is the king?" Mahu asked, running into the ground floor hall of the palace.

"He is asleep," Pentu, the physician, answered, glancing at Mahu in alarm: he looked terribly upset and his head was bandaged: he had evidently been wounded.

"Go and wake him," Mahu said.

"Wake a sick man in the middle of the night?"

"Make haste and go!"

"But what has happened?"

"Rebellion in the town. The king must be saved."

Both ran up to the first storey where the king lay

asleep on a humble bed in a small panelled room that had belonged to the princess's nurse, Asa.

They called Dio and sent her to the king. Screening the flame of the lamp with her palm, she went on tiptoe into the king's room and stopped to look at him from a distance. He slept so sweetly that it seemed a pity to wake him. But recalling Mahu's words 'life is dearer than sleep,' she went up to the sleeper and, bending down, kissed him on the head.

He woke up and smiled, screwing up his eyes at the light.

"What is it, Dio? Sleep, I am well."

"No, Enra, we mustn't sleep, get up. Mahu has come and says he must see you."

"Mahu? What for?" he asked, looking at her attentively and half-rising from the couch.

"He will hear it at once in any case," she thought and said:

"There is a riot in the town."

"And Tuta is coming with his army?" he guessed: he must have heard something before. "Why haven't I been told sooner? Though it is better so—all at once."

He spoke calmly, and, as it were, thoughtfully.

"Where is Mahu?"

"Shall I call him?"

"No, I will come."

He began dressing. Dio helped him: they were not shy of each other. He dressed without hurry.

"What is this?" he asked, seeing a glow in the windows.

"There is a fire somewhere."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Mahu will tell."

They went into the next room. From there the fire in the town could be seen: the king's granaries, the barracks, the palace and Aton's temple were burning.

Mahu approached the king and fell at his feet.

"Life, power, health to the king . . . ."

He could not speak for tears. The king bent down and embraced him.

"What is it, Mahu? Don't cry, all will be well. Are you wounded?" he asked, seeing the bandage on his head.

"O, sire, never mind me—we must save you!"

"Save me from what?"

Mahu briefly told him what had happened and exclaimed, falling at his feet again:

"Come, come quickly! The chariots are waiting at the garden gates. We shall manage somehow to go through the desert to the river lower down, where there are no ambushes, take boats and in another five days be in the loyal provinces of the North."

"Run away?" the king asked, as calmly as before.

"Yes, sire," Mahu replied. "Tuta's rabble may be here any minute. I can't answer for your life."

"No, my friend, I cannot. If I run away, what will happen here, in the holy province of Aton? Endless war because of me! I have begun with peace and I shall end with war? I say one thing and do another? No, I have had enough of this shame. And from whom should I run away? From Tuta? But what can he do to me? Take away my kingdom? Why, this is just what I wish. From the rebels? And what will they do to me? Kill me? Let them—death

is better than shame. Ankh-em-maat, He-who-lives-in-truth, is to die in falsehood? No, in death I shall say what I have said all my life: let there be peace . . . ."

He stopped suddenly and listened; the blast of trumpets and the beat of drums were heard in the distance. There was a panic in the palace and in the gardens.

The centurion of the Hittite amazons, the king's bodyguard, ran up the stairs shouting:

"Tuta's soldiers are here!"

"Where?" Mahu asked.

"At the garden gates. The fighting has begun."

All, except the king and Dio, ran downstairs.

The fierce noises of war invaded the quiet Maru-Aton gardens: the blast of the trumpets, the beat of the drums, the neighing of horses, the creaking of carts, the rumble of chariots, the cries of the chieftains. Torches glowed in the black shadow of the palm groves: the moonlit sky was red with the dancing flames of the fire that made the face of the moon look pale and crimsoned the gold disc of Aton above the altar on the temple roof.

The gardens were surrounded by a quadrangle of high, thick walls, like a fortress, with only one gateway that gave on the river; an inner wall divided the enclosure into two: stables, cellars, granaries and barracks of the palace guards were in the southern half while the northern was occupied with summer houses, shelters, chapels of the god Aton and the palace by the big artificial pond.

The vanguard of Tuta's troops stopped on reach-

ing Maru-Aton. Knowing how many treasures it held they wanted to plunder it.

They tried to force the gates. Mahu's soldiers repulsed them every time. But reinforcements came to the enemy continually and the rebels from the town joined them. They surrounded the garden, besieging it like a fortress and, at last, forced their way in.

The battle was now fought at the inner wall. The half-savage mercenaries from the north—Achaeans and Trojans—fought like lions. Naked but for brass leggings and brass plumed helmets, they flung small round shields behind their backs and fought desperately with the triangular iron sword-knife, one in each hand. Overcome by superior numbers they retreated to the pond. The water in it was shallow and only reached to the men's waists. The battle continued in the water so fiercely that it became clouded and warm with the blood.

Eteocles, the youthful leader of the Achaeans, was dying on the bank under Maki's withered birch tree and as he looked at its white stem he saw through the darkness of death his far-off native land.

Some were fighting and others plundering.

The tender stalks of the flowers in the beds broke under the soldiers' heavy tread. There were pools of blood on the floor of the chapel. The wood of the sacred pillars was chopped for bonfires, the purple of the sacred curtains was torn to make leg wrappings; the gold was scraped off the walls with fingernails. An old woman from the Jewish settlement, seeing that a precious casket had been screwed into

the floor and could not be carried away, bit at it so hard that she secured a pearl with her teeth.

Naaman, the prophet, also from the Jews' Settlement, was stamping on a gilded wooden disc of Aton—a gold one would not have been given even to a prophet—dancing and shouting.

"God of vengeance, Lord God of vengeance, show Thyself! Arise, judge of the earth, and judge the proud!"

Cellars were broken into. They were so flooded with wine that people went down on their hands and knees and lapped it up. People drank themselves to death. Two drunken men had a fight and falling to the bottom of the cellar were drowned in the wine.

The screams of women and the blood of murdered children formed a ghastly tribute to their respective gods—Aton, Amon or Jahve.

The Sun's garden, God's paradise, was turned into hell.

A handful of Achaeans and Trojans, who had not been massacred in the pond, retreated towards the palace that stood in the narrow part between the pond and the north wall of the garden. The palace was defended by Mahu's war-chariots, the black archers, Lycian slingers and Hittite Amazons.

Hearing that the king was in the palace, Tuta's soldiers attacked it: they wanted to take the king, dead or alive, so as to end the war.

At the same time Tutankhaton's main forces were approaching from the south and Ramose's troops from the north. The great battle that was to decide the destinies of Egypt began under the very walls of

Maru Aton. It looked phantom-like in the darkness of the night, the white moonlight and the red glow of the conflagration. The blast of the trumpets, the beat of the drums, the neighing of horses, the rumble of chariots, the clashing of swords, the whistling of arrows, the moans of the dying and the cries of the victors were all mingled in one seething hell. And the centre of it, the fixed axis in the whirling hurricane of the war, was the quiet palace tower.

The king and Dio were looking down from its flat roof.

"It's all because of me!" he repeated, wringing his hands, or, stretching them out to the combatants, he cried with desperate entreaty.

"Peace! Peace! Peace!"

It was as though he still hoped that men would hear him and stop fighting.

Or he stopped up his ears, covered his face with his hands, so as not to hear, not to see; or, running up to the roof bannisters, bent down and looked greedily at people dying and killing with his name on their lips, and there was such anguish in his face that it seemed as though every sword and spear and arrow pierced his heart as its aim. Or he ran to the staircase door that had been locked, banged it with his fists, and knocked his head against it, shouting:

"Open!"

And when Dio tried to restrain him he struggled out of her arms and begged her, with tears:

"Let me go to them!"

She knew he wanted to throw himself among the combatants so that they should kill him and stop killing one another.

Now and again he suddenly grew quiet and sat down on the floor, muttering something under his breath, quickly and inaudibly, as in delirium. Listening attentively Dio caught once the words of the incantation the old nurse Asa had said over the dying Princess Maki:

"Mother Isis calls
From the top of the hill,
Horus, my son,
The hill is on fire,
Bring me water,
Quench the fire!"

"He will die insane," Dio thought, and sitting next to him on the floor, she gently stroked his head and whispered: "My poor little boy! My poor little boy!"

Listening to the roaring laughter of war, seeing the sun disc of Aton turn red as though filled with blood, she thought: "Perhaps we were mistaken after all and God is not Love but Hate and the law of the world is not peace, but war?"

Time ceased to exist, it was eternity: there always had been, was, and would be this seething hell of war to the furthest ends of the earth from the beginning to the end of time.

"Bring me water.
Quench the fire!"

No, no water would quench it and they would burn in it for ever and ever.

"My poor little boy!" she kept whispering as she stroked his head and suddenly she added, with despairing tenderness: "My poor little girl!"

"Here I, too, am going mad," she thought. They

both smiled—they understood each other—and there was exquisite joy in this in spite of all the pain.

She saw blood on his face: he must have been wounded with an arrow when he looked at the battle leaning over the parapet; he had not felt it and she had not noticed it. She wiped off the blood with the edge of her dress, but a trace of it still remained.

Gazing at him she recalled the prophecy: "As many were astonied at Him; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men."

"You are He! You are He!" she whispered, with joyous terror.

"No, Dio, I am only His shadow," he answered, calmly and rationally. "But if His shadow suffers such agony, what will His suffering be?"

Suddenly he raised his eyes to the sky and jumped up.

"He is coming!" he cried in a voice so changed and with his face so altered, that she thought he would fall down in a fit. But she, too, looked at the sky and understood.

A gigantic, pyramid shaped ray, with its base on the ground and its apex in the zenith, flashed in the greyish sky of the morning, above the dying glow of the city fire, and the white opalescent lightnings of zodiacal light danced and quivered in it.

"Quick! Quick!" he repeated, trembling like those tremulous lights in the heavens.

They both made haste as though they were indeed meeting the Unexpected One.

Blowing up the embers on the altar the king put

on them splinters of sandalwood and cannacat. Lighting a long golden censer, shaped like an outstretched hand, Dio gave it to the king and herself took a cithern—a brass hoop, threaded with fine silver snakes that gave a high ringing sound. Both stood before the altar facing each other:

"I come to glorify Thy rays, living Aton, one and eternal God!" he intoned, and it seemed to her that his voice drowned the roaring laughter of the hell let loose.

"Praise be to the living Aton, who didst create the heavens and the secrets thereof! Thou art in the sky and Thy beloved son, Akhnaton, is on earth!" she replied.

Suddenly the sound of axes came from below. The building trembled as though it were going to fall; the enemy had rushed into the palace and the battle was being fought indoors.

"Fire!" someone shouted on the stairs and the cry re-echoed, with a familiar dread, in Dio's heart: she remembered how she had lain on the pyre, a victim ready to be slain. She rushed to the bannisters, leaned over, and in the breach of the garden wall saw Tutankhaton, the conqueror, in his chariot, wearing the royal helmet with the royal serpent over the forehead.

He saw her also and shouted to her, waving his hands. She did not hear the words, but understood that he wanted to save her and was calling to her to come down.

A black warrior, agile as a monkey, climbed to the top of a palm by the roof of the lodge and clever-

ly threw from there right at Dio's feet a rope-ladder. Hardly knowing what she was doing, she picked it up, fixed one end of it to the bannisters and let the other down.

It would have been quite easy for her who had tamed wild bulls on the Knossos arena to take the king in her arms and carry him down—he was thin as a skeleton and no heavier than a child.

But she stopped to think. She leaned over the bannisters once more and looked down. Tuta went on shouting and waving to her. She looked into his face: it was neither ill-natured nor kind; neither stupid nor intelligent: the everlasting mediocre face of the average man.

"Akhnaton will disappear, Tutankhaton will remain and the kingdom of this world shall be Tuta's kingdom," she recalled the saying and thought "Should I spit into that face? No, it isn't worth while."

She threw the ladder into the fire—the bottom storey was in flames already—and returned to the king.

Hearing and seeing nothing, he stood on the same spot stretching out his hands to the rising sun.

"O Lord, before the foundations of the earth were laid Thou didst reveal Thy will to Thy Son Who lives for ever. Thou, Father, art in my heart and no one knows Thee, but me, Thy son!"

With furious roaring laughter red tongues of flame shot up on all sides through the white coils of smoke, as though the hell let loose had leapt up to heaven.

Dio rushed to the king, looked into his face that was like the sun and recognized Him Who was to come.

"Is it Thee, O Lord?"

"It is I!"

He embraced her as a bridegroom embraces a bride and in a fiery storm of love raised her to the Father.

The palace, a light trellis-work structure of cedar and cyprus-wood, dry and resinous, burned like a candle and its fragrant smoke coiled like incense upon an altar to greet the rising sun.

But when the sun rose it shone upon a smoking black ruin—the tomb of Akhnaton and Dio.

VIII

UTANKHATON was king of Egypt. On his accession to the throne he changed his name from Tutankhaton—the living image of Aton—to Tutankhamon—the living image of Amon. He changed his religion just as easily. He took off his feet Amon's sandals with the divine image on the soles and bowed down before the god on whom he had trampled.

He moved from the City of the Sun to the ancient capital, Thebes, and began restoring Amon's temples throughout Egypt: he raised up idols of pure gold to him, multiplied gifts and levys, re-established feasts and sacrifices. He demolished the temples of Aton and destroyed his name wherever it was found—on granite colossi or personal amulets, on the high obelisks or in underground tombs. The same masons were hammering with their mallets as in King Akhnaton's reign: then they had been destroying the name of Amon and now the name of Aton; the same spies who had then been tracking Amon's secret worshippers were now hunting down the servants of Aton.

King Akhnaton's memory was anathematized. The curse was proclaimed throughout Egypt:

"May the Lord destroy the memory of him in the land of the living and may his double, Ka, find

no rest in the kingdom of the dead. Woe to thine enemies, Lord, their dwelling-place is in darkness. but the rest of the earth in thy light. The sun of them that hate thee is darkened, the sun of them that love thee is rising!"

No one dared to mention his name and he was called the Enemy, the Criminal, the Monster, or the Buffoon, the Fool.

The first men of the land—the well-born, the rich, the happy, soon forgot him; but the last—the beggars, the sick, the wretched remembered him for years. They did not believe in his death: "he died and rose from the dead," said some of them, while others asserted that he did not die at all, but escaped from the palace and wandered about the world as a beggar, secretly. But all equally believed that he would come again and restore truth and justice; would punish the wicked, show mercy to the good, comfort the sorrowful, free the slaves, make the poor and the rich equal, wipe out the field boundaries, like the Nile, with the waters of inexhaustible love; would save the world that was perishing in evil and be the second Osiris, the true Redeemer and Son.

"Do you know what rumours there are about?" Tuta said one day to Merira, the high priest of Amon, and his chief helper in the war upon Aton.

"What rumours, sire?"

"That the Criminal is alive."

"I have known it all along," Merira answered,

with a smile so strange that Tuta was surprised, almost alarmed.

"Known what?"

"That he is alive. He may die any number of times, but the Fool will always live for the fools! Foolishness is the sun of the world, and he, Uaenra, is the son of the Sun."

Tuta laughed and was reassured. But then he sighed and added sadly:

"Yes, my friend, foolishness is immortal. It is hard to combat it—harder than we had thought."

They spoke of other things. But in the middle of the conversation Merira asked as though recalling something:

"Do you know for certain, sire, that Akhnaton is dead?"

Tuta thought at first he was still joking, but, looking attentively into his face, was again surprised, almost frightened.

"How can you ask, my friend? Why, how could I not be certain when I saw with my own eyes. . . ."

"Yes, you must have excellent eyes: it is not easy to see from the battlefield and recognise a man's face at the top of a house in the night, through thickets of trees, smoke and flame!"

"But not I alone, everyone says he was there and Dio with him, and I certainly did see her."

"You saw her, but did you see him?"

"I think I did."

"You think—that means you are not certain."

"Come, Merira, can you really think?—"

"I don't think anything, sire, I only want to know."

They looked at each other in silence and both

felt uncomfortable. Again they spoke of other things. And when Merira rose to go, Tuta asked him:

"How is your health?"

"I am well, why?"

"You don't look well, you have grown much thinner in the face."

"I must be tired of waging war upon the Fool," Merira answered, with the same queer smile as before.

Tuta was holding his hand affectionately and looking into his eyes, as though he wanted to say something more, but did not venture to do so. Merira was silent also.

"And do you know where these rumours come from, about the Criminal being alive?" Tuta said at last. "From that accursed hole, the City of the Sun, damnation take it! Our friend Panehesy is still hiding there like a scorpion in a chink—there is no catching him. . . ."

Panehesy, the second priest of Aton, a mild fanatic, a 'holy fool,' in Ay's words, was one of the few people who had remained faithful to King Akhnaton.

"And it is not only he," Tuta continued. "All sorts of rascals keep going there. Living fools do their best for the dead, spreading seditious rumours among the people. . . ."

He paused and said, after a moment's thought:

"Do me the favour, my friend, go to the City and find out what is going on there; I have long meant to ask you. That wasps' nest ought to be destroyed and burnt down utterly!"

"No, sire, spare me. You have spies enough and I am not any good at that kind of thing," Merira replied so drily that Tuta did not insist.

But two days later Merira returned to the subject himself and suddenly said that he was ready to go. Tuta was overjoyed and at once sent him on the journey, with a whole pack of spies, an assembly of priests and a strong detachment of bodyguards

The City of the Sun was deserted. Several times during the war the rebellious mob and Tuta's troops burned and plundered it. And when the new king ascended the throne he ordered that it should be destroyed completely and the inhabitants driven out. At first they had to be driven out by force and, afterwards, they fled of their own accord from the accursed place where nothing but ruins remained.

The royal gardens of Maru-Aton were even more desolate than the city. Their walls were destroyed and waves of drifting sand covered the burnt-out flower beds, the dried-up ponds, the fallen trees and the charred remains of the lodges, arbours and chapels. The place that had once been God's paradise was now a desert.

Some three days after his arrival in the town Merira visited Maru-Aton gardens to see the spot where the Criminal perished.

It was the month of Paonzu, March—already hot summer in Egypt. The sun had just set and the Lybian hills stood out black and flat, like the charred edge of a papyrus against the red sky. The Nile, too, seemed black and heavy, streaked with red here

and there. The sail of a boat looked like a blood-stained rag against its dark surface.

The breath of the wind was hot as that of a man in a fever; the evening had brought it neither freshness nor rest. The grasshoppers chirped like dry sticks crackling in the fire; felled palms, lying on the ground, rustled with their yellow leaves as the sand dropped from them on the ground.

A shepherd's pipe wailed in the distance; monotonously sad, the sounds fell slowly one after the other like tear after tear.

"The wail is raised for Tammuz far away.
The mother-goat and the kid are slain,
The mother sheep and the lamb are slain.
The wail is raised for the beloved Son."

The old shepherd was Engur, son of Nurdahan, a Babylonian slave of Tammuzadad, brought by Dio to Egypt from the island of Crete.

As he drove up to Maru-Aton Merira saw Engur's lean sheep and goats nibbling the dry grass on the hills. "It must be he singing," Merira guessed, listening to the sounds of the pipe. He knew the song: he had heard it once together with Dio and she translated the Babylonian words into Egyptian for him. He recalled them now: "The wail is raised for the beloved Son!"

"It's always about Him, there is no getting away from Him," he thought drearily, frowning with disgust.

A young priest, Horus, a pupil of Ptamose, was walking beside him. He was the young man with the austere and meagre face whom Dio had seen

once in the subterranean sanctuary of the god Ram. He was telling Merira about the rebels who had just been arrested as secret worshippers of the Criminal—the king's dwarf, Iagu, the runaway slave, Yubra, old Zenra, Dio's nurse, and other poor and obscure people. He hoped to trace through them Issachar and Aton's priest Panehesy, the two chief rebels.

"Have you questioned them?" Merira asked.

"I have."

"What do they say?"

"That the Criminal is alive."

"How could they believe anything so absurd?"

"They say they have seen him."

"Where, when, how?"

"They would rather die than say."

"What are you going to do with them?"

"Whatever you tell me, father."

"It is all one to me, but remember: if you put the living fools to death the dead one will be alive all the more. I should release them all and make an end of it."

"As you like, master, but what will the king say?"

"Oh yes, the king. You want to please the king? Very well, do what you like, only don't talk to me about it. . . . What day is it?"

"The twenty-fourth of Paonzu."

"And when did King Akhnaton die?"

"On the twenty-fifth."

"What a coincidence!"

"How do you mean?" Horus asked him, with sudden alarm.

Merira made no answer and stopped to look round.

"Where have you brought me, my friend? A cheerful sort of place!"

The burning sky was a deep red, the breath of the wind was hot and feverish, the yellow palm leaves made a dry rustle as the sand dropped from then on the ground, the crickets chirped and the pipe wailed.

"Always about Him—there is no getting away from Him!" Merira thought again, drearily. He sat down heavily on a tree-trunk on the ground, stretched himself, raising his arms above his head and yawned convulsively like a man who had not slept for several nights.

"How dreary it all is, oh dear!" he said, as he yawned. "Don't you find it dreary, Horus?"

"Find what dreary, father?"

"Everything, my friend, everything: being born, living, dying and rising from the dead. It would not be so bad if there were something new there, but what if it is the same as here—everlasting dreariness!"

He suddenly raised his eyes to Horus and laughed.

"Why, my son, you seem to have two little lumps on your forehead! That's a strange thing. You have grown horns just like a little ram. Bend down, let me feel them."

Horus was frightened. He knew that Merira was seriously ill and knew what his complaint was, but he feared to think of it. He always hoped that God would have mercy and spare the great prophet who had saved the earth from the Criminal

He stood more dead than alive. But so strong was the habit of obeying the master that at the

words 'bend down,' he submissively bent his shaven head. Merira gently moved his palm over it and again a smile that was like a grimace of disgust appeared on his face.

"No, there's nothing, it is smooth. . . . But why are you so frightened, you foolish boy? Come, I was joking, I wanted to test you. You keep watching me, afraid I will go mad. But I won't, don't you fear. I have only grown rather foolish through my war with the Fool, but it will soon pass off. . . ."

Horus bent down again, seized his hand and kissed it. "If he dies, I will die with him," he thought and calmed down.

"I know you love me, dear boy," Merira said, kissing him on the head. "There, that's enough talking, let us go. Where is the place of the fire?"

Walking a few steps they came to a sandy open space—the big pond. Beside it, Maki's birch tree, buried in the sand, showed a bit of the broken white stem.

As he passed it, Merira for some reason recalled Dio, and he suddenly wanted to kiss the white slender stem, rosy in the light of the setting sun. But he felt shy of Horus: the young man might again imagine something. He merely slowed his pace and touched the stem as though it were a living hand stretched out to him from the earth, and for the first time after many days he smiled a real and not a jeering smile.

Passing the pond they came to a small sandy hillock, with charred planks and beams sticking out here and there. These were the ruins of the burnt palace—the tomb of Akhnaton and Dio.

"Was it here he perished?" Merira asked.

"Yes," Horus replied. "This is a holy place to them: they come here to worship the Criminal."

On the top of the hill two charred cross-beams, with a brass hoop at the top—probably a bolt that had been curled in the fire—stood out clearly against the red evening sky, like the hieroglyphic of life, the looped cross Ankh.

"What is this? Did it happen of itself in the fire?" Merira asked, pointing to it.

"No, the Criminal's worshippers must have made it," Horus answered, and calling one of the soldiers of the bodyguard, who were standing by the hillock, he told him to take away the cross.

The man climed up, drew the poles out of the sand, broke them and flinging them on the ground, trampled upon them.

"He is alive, alive, alive! He was dead and behold he is alive!" Merira heard a loud voice behind him and, turning round, saw a thin ragged man, blackened by the sun and shaggy like a wild beast, walking towards him with a distorted face and fiercely burning eyes.

"I know what you have come for, murderer!" he cried, like one possessed. "You want to kill the dead, but behold he is alive and you are dead!"

At a sign from Horus the soldiers seized the man.

"Let him go," Merira commanded, and turning to the man asked him:

"Who are you?"

"Don't you recognise me? And yet we are old friends, berries from the same vine. We both are

his murderers—only I have grown wiser and you are still foolish!"

Merira looked at him and recognized Issachar the Jew.

"Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel," Issachar cried again, lifting up his hands. "They shall look upon Him Whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one is in bitterness for his firstborn!"

And as though in answer to the cry the shepherd's pipe wailed:

> "Dead is the Lord, dead is Tammuz!
> Dogs wander about in the ruined house,
> Ravens flock to his funeral feast.
> O heart of the Lord! O pierced side!"

Merira walked up to Issachar, took him by the hand, led him aside, and said:

"Stop shouting and tell me plainly what do you want of me?"

"Don't you know?"

"I don't."

"Then I won't tell you: you wouldn't believe me if I did. He will tell you himself."

Merira understood that 'he' meant King Akhnaton.

"Thine hour is at hand, Merira. To-morrow is a great day, do you know what it is?"

"Yes, the day of the Fool's death."

"Mind you don't find yourself among the fools, you clever one!" Issachar said, turning to go.

At a sign from Horus the soldiers again ran up and seized him, but Merira said once more:

"Let him go, don't interfere with him!"

The soldiers released him, and he went without quickening his pace or turning round, as though certain of not being touched again.

"Are you going to let him off, father?" Horus asked Merira. "This is Issachar, the Jew, their prophet, the chief rebel," he added, thinking that Merira had not recognised him.

"But what are we to do with him? You see he is crazy, nothing is to be gained from him!" Merira answered, shrugging his shoulders, and went to where his chariot was waiting for him. He stepped into it and drove into the town.

IX

ERIRA was staying in Tuta's house, which had, at the king's orders, been preserved for the benefit of posterity. Merira lived in the summer house by himself, Horus and the other priests were in the winter house and the soldiers in the outbuildings.

Returning to the town after dark Merira called on Horus and told him to have everything ready in the upper Aton's temple at daybreak for a service to Amon and laying a curse upon the Criminal.

Then he went indoors to the upper chamber, where the conspirators' meeting had once been held, and lay down on the couch. He lay there with his eyes closed, his face still as death; he did not sleep and knew he would not.

Late at night he got up and sniffed the air with a grimace of disgust. His old illness was upon him again: he was everywhere pursued by bad smells—of dead rats, as in a granary, of bats' dirt as in the tombs, of rotten fish as on the banks of the Nile, where fish is cleaned, salted and dried in the sun.

He opened a box at the head of the bed and taking out a gold casket, with white powder in it, sniffed it, put some on his tongue and spat it out. He knew the powder would make him sleep but afterwards sleeplessness would be worse than ever.

He placed the casket back in the box and took out the ring with the carbuncle—Amon's eye. He lifted the stone which turned on a tiny golden hinge and peeped into the cavity underneath, filled with silvery grey powder—the poison. Only a half of it remained, the other he had put into the king's cup at Saakera's feast. Moving the stone into its place he put the ring back into the box.

He went down into the garden and then through a gate in the garden wall into the street, bathed in the white moonlight on one side and black with the shadows of the ruins on the other.

He stooped as he walked with his head bent, treading heavily and leaning on a staff, like a weary pilgrim at the end of a day's journey.

Clouds, fluffy like lambs, with transparent opalescent fleece, tawny-pink and silvery-blue in the moonlight, slowly moved all in one direction as though grazing in the pastures of heaven, with the moon for shepherd. There was stillness in heaven and stillness on earth; nothing stirred, as though bound by the moon's silver chains; only bats flitted to and fro like shuttles in a loom.

Suddenly there came the sound of howling and laughter as though someone, tickled to the point of tears, were both laughing and weeping. It was the howling of hyenas that must have scented Merira. It was followed by the hysterical barking of jackals. The dead city came to life. But gradually they subsided and stillness reigned once more.

Passing a huge piece of waste ground with charred planks and beams—remnants of the king's palace, Merira came to Aton's temple.

Most of the temple had remained. The huge building, with thick walls of well-baked brick and stone, could not be burned and was not easy to demolish. Only wooden rafters in the ceilings had been burned and ceilings and columns had fallen down in places. All bas-reliefs of King Akhnaton sacrificing to the god of the Sun had been broken and hieroglyphic inscriptions painted over or erased. The three hundred and sixty-five alabaster altars, in the seven courts of the temple, had also been destroyed and their place defiled: cartloads of filth had been brought from the Jews' Settlement and flung there, so that for a time the stench took one's breath away. But soon the sun burnt out and cleansed everything, turning filth into black earth; the wind of the desert covered it with sand and what had once been a place of pollution was fragrant with the fresh smell of mint and bitter wormwood.

"Seven courts—seven temples: of Tammuz of Babylon, Attis of the Hittites, Adon of Canaan, Adun of Crete, Mithra of Mitanni, Ashmun of Phoenicia, Zagreus of Thrace. All these gods are the shadow of the One to come," Merira recalled and again he thought drearily: "He is always everywhere, there is no escaping from Him."

Suddenly there was a sound of footsteps. He looked round—there was no one. This happened several times. At last, by the time Merira reached the eighth, the secret temple, where the Holy of Holies had been, he saw in the distance a man who was running from moonlight into the shadow. He knew people were robbed and murdered in the city at night; he remembered he had no weapons; he

stopped and wanted to shout "who goes there?" but felt such an aversion from his own voice that he said nothing and went into the temple.

The sixteen giant figures of Osiris in the likeness of King Akhnaton, in royal tiaras and tightly drawn winding sheets, had all been broken to bits. The ceiling had fallen in and pale moonlight fell upon the pale blocks of alabaster—the giant limbs of the dead giants.

Picking his way between them and climbing over them, Merira approached the inner wall of the Holy of Holies, where there was a figure of a Sphinx, with a lion's body and human arms, raising to Aton the Sun a figure of the goddess Maat, the Truth, as a sacrificial offering. The Sphinx had the face of King Akhnaton; if a man had been tortured for a thousand years in hell and then came to the earth again, he would have such a face.

The Sphinx had not been destroyed, either because those engaged on the task had failed to recognize the Criminal's face or because they had not the courage to destroy so terrible a monster.

Merira stood on a stone to see it better in the pale moonlight. He was looking at it eagerly and suddenly stretched forward to it and kissed it on the lips.

At the same moment he felt that someone was standing behind his back: he turned round and saw Issachar.

"Ah, it's you again!" he said, stepping off the stone. "Why do you follow me about? What are you doing here?"

"And what are you doing?" Issachar asked.

"I am waiting for *him,*" Merira answered, with a jeer. "If he is alive let him come. Does he visit you?"

"No. But he will come to us together: we both wanted to kill him and we shall both see him alive."

"Are you speaking of the king?"

"Of the king and of the Son—through the king to the Son—there is no other way for you and me."

"Why do you talk as though you were my equal? I am an Egyptian and you are a dirty Jew. Your Messiah is not ours."

"He is the same for all. You have killed Him and we shall give Him birth."

"And kill him also? . . . . Well, go along," Merira said, and walked on, without looking round. Issachar followed him.

Suddenly Merira stopped, looked round and said:

"Will you follow me about much longer? Go along, I tell you, while you have a chance."

"Don't drive me away, Merira. If I go away He will not come to you. . . ."

"Do you imagine you've a charmed life, you Jewish dog?" Merira shouted, raising his stick.

Issachar never stirred and looked into his eyes. Merira lowered the stick and laughed.

"Ah, you crazy creature! What am I to do with you?" He paused and then said, in a changed voice:

"Very well, come along. Shall we go to my house?"

Issachar nodded, without speaking.

They walked quickly, as though in a hurry. Passing the seven sanctuary courts they came to the

street. They never spoke and only as they drew near Tuta's estate, Merira said:

"What time is it?"

"About seven," Issachar answered, glancing at the sky. The time of the night was reckoned from sunset.

"Another five hours before sunrise. Well, there is plenty of time," Merira said.

They walked through the garden to the summer house. In the hall Merira took a lamp burning in a niche in the wall and led Issachar through several empty chambers. They went up the stairs, passed Merira's bedroom and entered the room next to it.

"Lie down here," Merira said, pointing to a couch, "I shall be next door. Lie still, don't get up and don't come in to me, do you hear?"

Issachar again nodded silently.

"Are you hungry? I expect you have not tasted food for the last day or two. See how thin you are."

"No, I am thirsty," Issachar replied.

Merira took a jug of beer off the table and gave it to him. He drank greedily.

"Why do you tremble?" Merira asked, noticing that Issachar's hands trembled so that he could hardly hold the jug.

He threw a cloak to him.

"Lie down and wrap yourself up, perhaps you will get warm."

"I am not sleepy, I will sit up."

"Lie down, lie down, I tell you!"

Issachar lay down on the couch. Merira covered him up with the cloak.

"Sleep. I will wake you at daybreak. We will go to the upper temple and meet *Him* there.". . . .

Issachar sat up suddenly and would have kissed Merira's hand but he drew it quickly away.

He went into the next room, carefully shut the door after him, but did not lock it; put the lamp on a stand, took from the shelf by the wall two bleached cedar tablets and writing a few lines upon them hid them in his bosom. Then he took out of the box at the head of the bed the ring with the carbuncle, Amon's eye, and put it on his finger.

He paced up and down the room, muttering something under his breath, quickly and inaudibly as in delirium.

Two chairs of honour, one for the host and another for the visitor, stood according to Egyptian custom on a carpeted brick platform, one step high, in the middle of the room between four lotos-shaped, painted and gilded columns.

Every time that Merira walked past these chairs he slowed down his step and, without turning his head, looked at one of them out of the corner of his eye. His face was sleepy and immovable and he kept muttering to himself.

He spent more than an hour in this fashion. The moonlit sky through the clink-like windows with a stone grating under the very ceiling, turned darker and darker, and at last the grating was no longer visible: the moon must have set.

Merira lingered by the platform longer and longer each time. Suddenly he stopped and smiled, looking intently at one of the chairs. He stepped on to the platform, sat down in the other chair, stretched himself and yawned.

"Forgive me, sire," he said aloud, as though speak-

ing to someone who sat on the chair opposite him. "I know it is unseemly to yawn in the presence of a king, especially of a dead one. But I am fearfully sleepy. And it wouldn't be so bad if I were awake, but this is a dream. Does it ever happen to you? To be asleep and yet to feel sleepy at the same time? Issachar now wouldn't yawn in your presence. I confess I envied him last night. He is shaking with fear but he would give his soul to see you! It is he you ought to visit. But evidently the dead are like women: you only love those who don't put too much trust in you. . . . By the way, I ought to have locked the door into his room, I forgot to do it. He would be frightened to death if he came in, poor fellow! . . . . But perhaps I left it open on purpose so that he might come in and I should know whether he could see you. . . . This is what I am driven to in my dreariness! It is dreary, Enra, very dreary. Can it be as bad in your world? Always the same thing—rotten fish in eternity. . . . Or is it rather different with you? Is it worse or better? You are silent? I don't like it when you are silent and look at me with pity as though to say 'it's better for such as I and worse for such as you' . . . . Well, aren't you going to speak? Tell me, what have you come for? Do you remember, Enra, how you said when I wanted to kill you, 'I love you, Merira' . . . . And just now who is it has said it, you or I?"

He paused as though listening to an answer and then spoke again.

"You love your enemy? He has taught you this? You come from Him to try and save me? No, Enra,

you cannot save a man who does not want to be saved. You died for what you loved; let me too die for what I love—not for the world beyond the grave but for this one, for this life—for living and not for rotten fish. The world already smells of putrefaction because of Him and one day it will stifle in its own stench. He lies that the world kills Him; He kills the world. He calls Himself the Son of God in order to kill the true Son—the world. I know it is hard to go against Him, but I don't care, I don't seek for what is easy: I am the first but not the last to rise against Him. There will be men like me when He comes: they will kill Him and destroy His work; they will perish but will not save the world; this is how it will be, Enra!"

He paused again and smiled suddenly, as he did in the Maru-Aton garden that afternoon when looking at Maki's birch tree he recalled Dio.

"How living you are to-day, more living than you have ever been! I see every fold of your dress: see how small the pleats are: you have good pleaters in your world. You have the royal serpent on your forehead; so you had renounced your crown here and accepted it there? I see every line in your face: the charming, childish ones round the mouth—your smile, Enra. I loved it so and I love it now. Enra, Enra, do you know that I love you? You have grown younger, more beautiful. And how is Dio? Is she with you? There, forgive me, I won't. . . . Yes, you are quite living, you could not be more so! And yet I know that you don't exist, that you are my dream. . . . Goodbye, Enra, this is the last time

I see you. I want to escape from Him. . . . You think I cannot? He is always and everywhere and there is no escaping from Him? . . . Well, we shall live and die and see. There is a great deal you don't know, Enra: you are wise like a god, but you are not clever. You remember, you yourself used to say 'wisdom is beyond reason'. . . . Oh, I nearly forgot: here is the ring, do you remember it? Take it as a keepsake. . . . A-ah, you laugh! You understand? Yes, I want to test you: if the ring is not on my finger when I wake, it will mean that you exist, and if it is on my finger—you don't exist. Well, will you take it?"

His guest stretched out his hand to him—a hand he knew so well that he would have recognized it among a thousand—a long, slender, beautiful hand, with the same childishly piteous expression as the face, with blue veins under the brown skin, so real that warm, red blood seemed to be flowing in them. The middle finger was slightly apart from the others so that the ring could be slipped on more easily and the nail on it was a dark rosy colour with a white arch at the bottom.

"If I touch this hand I will die of horror," Merira thought and an icy shiver ran down his back. Yet he did touch it, put the ring on the middle finger, felt the firm bone under the soft flesh and he felt no horror but only a desire to know what it was, who it was.

He suddenly clasped the hand: it was soft, dry, warm—a real, living hand!

"You are real! You are real! I adjure you by the living God, tell me, are you real?" he cried in

such a voice as though his soul left his body with that cry.

Regaining consciousness he saw an empty chair in front of him and Issachar kneeling beside it. Looking at the chair he trembled so violently that Merira heard his teeth chattering.

"What has frightened you so?"

Issachar said nothing and went on staring at the chair, his teeth chattering.

"He has been here," he whispered at last, turning to Merira.

"Who?"

"King Akhnaton."

"Have you seen him?"

Issachar was going to say 'No,' but said 'Yes,' as though somebody else had uttered the word instead of him. And no sooner had he said it than he believed he had really seen the king.

"Have you heard him?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"That the Son would come to you."

"What else?"

"He spoke about the ring. You gave him the ring to test him."

"Did he take it?"

"He did."

"But what's this?" Merira asked, with a laugh, pointing to the ring on his finger. "You heard me raving—this is all the miracle."

Issachar gazed at the ring in silence with the same

terror as he had gazed at the empty chair. Suddenly he raised his eyes to Merira and exclaimed:

"He has been here! He has!"

"Yes, he has. I, too, think that Somebody has been here," Merira answered quietly and, as it were, thoughtfully, without a laugh.

He paused and then said, getting up:

"Let us go, it is time, the sun will soon be rising."

X

HE sun had not yet risen but the sky was already rosy and the morning star shone like a tiny sun, when Merira and Issachar climbed by the outer staircase of Aton's temple on to the flat roof where the great altar of the Sun stood intact; only the disc of Aton had been torn away and the bas-relief of King Akhnaton on the wall broken to bits. Aton had once been glorified here and now a service to Amon was to be performed at the altar and the Criminal was to be solemnly anathematized.

Horus, with the other priests, met Merira. All were surprised to see Issachar, the Jew, by his side.

"Leave us," Merira said to the priests, and taking Horus by the hand led him aside, looked into his face and asked: "Do you love me, my son?"

"Why do you ask, father? You know I love you."

"Do then what I ask you."

"Speak, I listen."

"Don't lay a finger on Iserker, let him go; whatever happens, remember that he is innocent. Release also all those whom you have arrested. Will you do it?"

"I will."

"Swear it."

"May I not see the sun in eternity if I don't do it!"

"May God reward you, my son," Merira said, embracing and kissing him. "And now go!"

Horus glanced at Issachar and was about to ask a question, but Merira frowned and repeated:

"Go!"

Horus was frightened, as at Maru-Aton the day before, and obeyed as he had done then; he turned to go without a word. But as he descended the outer staircase of the temple he stopped half-way so that he could not be seen from the roof and yet see what was happening there. The priests stood on the first landing below him and the soldiers still lower down.

"Can you sing the service to Aton?" Merira asked Issachar when they were left alone.

"Yes."

They went up to the small altar at the foot of the great one. White alabaster dust of the broken bas-relief of King Akhnaton crunched like snow under their feet.

All was ready for the service: the altar was decked with flowers and incense was burning upon it.

Merira stood before the altar with his face to the east, where the red ember of the sun was already ablaze in the misty gorge of the Arabian hills. Issachar stood facing him.

"God Aton is the only God and there is none other God but He!" Merira intoned.

"I come to glorify thy rays, living Aton, one eternal God!" Issachar replied.

"I declare the way of life unto you all, generations that have been and are to be: render praise to God

Aton, the living God and ye shall live," Merira intoned again and Issachar replied:

"Praise be to thee, living Aton, who has created the heavens and the secrets thereof! Thou art in heaven and thy son, Akhnaton Uaenra, is on earth."

"Thy essence, Uaenra, is the essence of the sun," they both sang together, "thy flesh is the sunlight, thy limbs the beautiful rays. In truth thou didst proceed from the Sun as a child from its mother's womb. The Sun rises in the sky and rejoices at its son on the earth!"

The rising sun lighted the altar. Merira raised the libation cup and slowly, drop by drop, poured on the burning embers the thick, blood-red wine.

"Lord!" he exclaimed in such a heart-rending voice that Issachar began to tremble as in the night when looking at the empty chair he saw the Invisible, "Lord! Before the foundations of the earth were laid Thou didst reveal Thy will to Thy Son who is forever. Thou, Father, art in His heart and no one knows Thee except Him, Thy Son!"

Then, turning his back to Issachar, he put some fresh wine into the cup, put it on the altar table, took the tablets from his bosom and placed them on the table, too; taking the ring off his finger, he lifted the carbuncle and put the poison in the cup. He took the cup in his hands, again turned with his face to the sun and cried three times in a low, as it were distant, voice:

"Glory be to the Sun, the Son Who is to come!"

Issachar fell on his knees and covered his face with his hands: it suddenly seemed to him that Merira saw the One Who was to come.

Merira raised the cup to his lips, drained it, and dropping it, stretched his hands to the sun with a low cry:

"He! He!"

Then he fell to the ground like a man struck by lightning.

Horus rushed to him and bending over him cried: "Father!"

But glancing into his face he knew he was dead. People rushed to the roof in answer to Horus's cries and seized Issachar, thinking he was the murderer. But someone gave Horus the tablets. He read:

I, Merira, son of Nehtaneb, high priest of Aton, the only living God, kill myself for having wanted to kill a righteous man. Akhnaton Uaenra, Sun's Joy, Sun's only Son, lives for ever!"

Horus carried out the dead man's behest and released Issachar. All made way for him when he moved to go—so strange and terrible was his face.

He went to the very edge of the roof and stretching his arms to the rising sun cried, as though he knew that his voice would be heard at the furthest ends of the earth:

"Thus says the Lord God of Hosts, the God of Israel: out of Egypt shall I call my Son. Behold I will send my Messenger and the Lord whom you seek and the Messenger of the covenant you delight in shall suddenly come to His temple. Behold, He cometh!"

THE END

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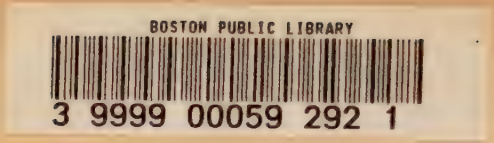
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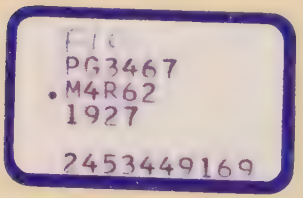
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